JACK PERKINS
SAND CASTLE
WALTER MILLIS

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By Walter Millis

ANNE MARTIN, the daughter of a disappointed newspaper man, takes up her life in Greenwich Village and surveys the place and its inhabitants with a large, steady, and utterly candid glance. To the Village she is a problem, to her the Village is a theatrical performance. She neither condemns nor admires it, and only two of the people that she meets there touch her at all. Shy, bewildered Jasper Sigourney, perplexed by marriage, adds to the complications by falling in love with Anne. Her other friend is Cass Morgan, a cynical ex-reporter, who is blown this way and that by the tempests of his own emotions. With these three a strange alchemy is at work which tests them curiously and in the end shows their abilities and their limitations.

Nowhere does the author lose his sense of humor and nowhere does he forget that his characters are self-determining individuals. His book is a study of modern people that bears out in its tolerance the prefatory quotation: 'The great principle of charity is not to blame the fishes for their bad taste in liking to live under water.'

SAND CASTLE

WALTER MILLIS

O. P. sent to R. R. L. 7/29/36

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WALTER
MILLIS

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TO

MARY RAOUL MILLIS

'A great principle of charity is not to blame the fishes for their bad taste in liking to live under water.'

GEORGE SANTAYANA

SAND CASTLE

I

The first time that I ever saw Anne Martin she was sitting with her legs tucked under her upon a sofa, in the middle of Sue Porter's crowded top-floor apartment in West Eleventh Street. Her youthful shoulders were quite firmly against the wall, and she was looking straight before her. A large, steady, and utterly candid glance, surveying the world. It was, it seems, a characteristic attitude.

She conveyed the immediate impression of a lofty and naïve innocence; and she seemed — in the midst of one of Sue's slightly disreputable parties — almost startlingly out of place. I don't mean to say that one would not have remembered her, in any event. But it was only too seldom that Sue's guests could have been described as being innocent. Sue was one of those engaging neo-Greenwich Village hostesses of an uncertain status who appear to have the faculty of collecting ambiguous people; the room was full of them at the moment, they were making rather too much noise, and they had certainly had more gin and orange juice than they needed. Vaguely artistic young women and even more vaguely well-to-do young men; people who read the literary reviews and tried to talk like them; people with unexpected passions for such things as Irish glass or pewter spoons or each other's husbands and wives. There was apt to be a slight flabbiness about the men and a certain hollowness

about the eyes of the women; their conversation always sounded a little cleverer than it was, and none of them was of the least importance whatever. One dropped in upon Sue's parties expecting to find that sort of thing and be amused by it. But upon this particular occasion I had dropped in, and had found myself looking into the calm and inquiring eyes of this girl who was — obviously — not that sort of thing at all.

Descriptions, of course, are of no use. The eyes, if you insist upon it, were blue — at least I think they were — and she was perhaps twenty-two or twenty-three years old. But she lacked the self-conscious eagerness of the age; her manner seemed to imply a kind of assured repose, and her patent curiosity was clothed in an oddly untroubled air of detachment. The cigarette smoke lay in its slyly poisonous levels through the room; some one put a record on the victrola and then took it off again; some one else spilled a cocktail shaker all over a table in the corner. A Russian leaning against the mantelpiece was listening in amazement to a fierce defense of Czarism from a young lady who said she was a supporter of Mussolini. The girl merely observed them, impartially, and the effect of her stare was at once sharp and striking. It is not very easy to describe. But her mere presence in a roomful of people of that kind was both anomalous and provoking.

A boy offered her a cocktail. She took it, and returned a smile of a sudden and spring-like enchantment. And immediately I asked Sue Porter where she had come from.

'She's a dear,' said Sue, with that vague irrelevance which appeared to characterize herself and her

friends. 'I found her. I picked her up. I like to pick up people.'

I told Sue that I did not consider her a proper influence for young girls.

'She has attached herself to me,' said Sue. 'I found her in the middle of Washington Square. She was sitting on a bench with her feet crossed, looking at the Arch. Fancy that! It was the first time I ever noticed anybody looking at the Washington Arch. So I asked her where she was going.'

'But what made you do that?'

'I don't know . . . What should I have asked her? . . . She said she wasn't going anywhere. So I asked her what she was doing for a living. And she said, "I don't know. Just looking at things, I suppose." Her father's a newspaperman. He's dead.'

I said I thought it was an interesting programme.

Sue lit a cigarette. 'Yes,' she said, with the cigarette in her lips, 'it seemed that any one who could look at the Washington Arch for a living must be an interesting type. . . . Cass, darling, could you do that?'

The person thus addressed sat down on the edge of the table next to her. 'I shouldn't want to,' he said.

'I think she is charming,' said Sue. 'But she is frightfully naïve. You can see it by looking at her. I think she must have come out of a convent.'

'But her father was a newspaperman?' I suggested.

'He was a washout,' said Cass abruptly. Cass Morgan was a tall and rather shambling individual with shaggy eyebrows; he happened to be one of the few among Sue's guests who was as genuinely striking in his way as this girl was in hers, and he was also, I remembered, a newspaperman.

'I knew her father,' said Morgan. 'Old Charley Martin, on the *Morning Post*. Always signed himself "J. Charles Martin." You must remember his peace-conference stuff. It was terrible. I didn't like him.'

This opinion was more or less meaningless because it was a point with Morgan never to like anything. The man was a cynic. He said it was the reason why he came to Sue Porter's parties. His acquaintances said that it was merely the conventional tribute to the traditional cynicism of the journalistic trade. Well, the phrases in which he expressed it were trite enough, Heaven knows, but I was never quite able to share the opinion. I should have preferred to do so, because an honest and thoroughgoing contempt for the universe is inevitably disturbing. But in his company I could never lose the haunting fear that he might be genuine. His lined and middle-aged face, with its heavy eyebrows and deep-set and penetrating eyes, affected me in rather an odd way — as if he really might know something so awful that he had to dress it perpetually in a vulgar pessimism.

'But I didn't know,' he said, staring impolitely at the girl, who as it happened was staring back at him with an equal frankness, 'that Charley Martin ever had a daughter. I didn't know he ever had a wife. Don't see how he managed to get one.'

Sue swung her pretty ankles against the table leg and hummed the current musical-comedy hit. 'Well, he had the daughter anyway,' she said dreamily. 'She's a starry-minded innocent. You mustn't corrupt her, Cassy.' Sue slipped off the table. It appeared that a young man was breaking up things in the pantry because he couldn't find the extra bottle of gin.

'Morgan,' I said, 'how does one go about it when one's business in life is "just looking at things"?'

He glowered somberly at me. 'They usually put it differently. "Just looking 'em over" would be nearer the truth. What other business have any of the damn pretty little fools got, I'd like to know?'

The stupidity irritated me. 'You don't see the point. It's clearly a question of a philosophy. I'm in the mood for philosophies and fine distinctions. This creature is fascinating, Morgan; she is a discovery.'

'Then go and ask her,' said Cass, turning his back deliberately upon the subject. 'But mind she doesn't discover you.'

The girl had taken two sips of the cocktail and put it down. I suppose she was so much interested in what was going on that she had forgotten it. The general tide of noise and chatter flowed about her and seemed to excite her, but — it was queer — it did not seem to touch her in the least. She contrived to convert that sofa of hers into a sort of royal box at a theater. She isolated herself. Sue said that she must have come out of a convent, and the naïveté of her attitude was unmistakable. But it did not, somehow, suggest to me a conventual education. So presently I asked her, and she turned her large eyes calmly upon me and said: 'No. Why?'

Perhaps I should have foreseen the difficulty of responding to that monosyllabic query. I could not possibly answer by saying, 'Because you looked a trifle simple-minded, my dear young lady,' which would have been the truth; while the directness of the question seemed to offer no opportunity for the usual evasions of polite intercourse.

'I don't know,' I said. 'Force of contrast, maybe.'

She smiled interrogatively.

'This sort of thing, you know.' I made vague gestures. 'I don't suppose it's exactly your style, is it? I mean, they're rather a trifling lot, most of them, when you come down to it.'

'Are they?'

I had the sense of its being a little difficult to get on. 'Oh, there's no real harm in them,' I said loftily. 'I mean, I don't think so. Sue's friends seem to pack away a good many gin cocktails, and I suppose the sanctity of the home gets rather badly mixed up now and then amid their various inhibitions, or whatever beastly thing they call it . . .'

'But is there any harm in that?'

Under the circumstances, it was something of a poser. 'I thought you might think so. Of course, if you don't ——'

'Do you?'

'I decline to answer,' I said hastily.

'But I'm asking for information.'

'Of course. Sue told me your business was looking at things.'

The girl laughed. 'Yes, I told her that. But I want to know about the "trifling lot."'

I was, I confess, a little puzzled. 'All I meant was that you piqued my curiosity. You hardly seemed to belong here. Oh, they're a good-hearted crowd — most of them. That Westmoreland Perkins — fellow over yonder in the golf trousers — seems to me about as mean a little insect as you would be likely to encounter. But he is an exception. The rest of them make different kinds of fools of themselves, but I suppose it's their own business.'

'You know, I really *don't* belong here,' she said,

with a sudden warmth. 'I really don't belong anywhere, I suppose. It's funny to think about it, but really I don't.'

'Then what did you come here for?'

'To see what it was like, I imagine. It's why I generally do things.'

'Honestly? You do pique my curiosity.'

'I haven't been in a convent,' she said, 'but I have been living abroad. Maybe it had something of the same effect. Now I've come back, and I want to see some things happen.'

'So that's why you let Sue Porter pick you up?'

'Perhaps.'

'I'm afraid you'll be disappointed.'

'I never expect much, so I'm not often disappointed.... Tell me about them.' She swept the room with her eyes. 'They're mostly a sort of literary people, aren't they?'

'A sort, yes. As a matter of fact, they are mostly advertising agents or in banks or things like that. But they write and paint stuff and talk about it. Is that what you hoped?'

'Maybe,' she said, a trifle doubtfully.

'This man with the cocktail shaker is a poet. He has invented a new sonnet form in which, I believe, he rhymes all the first words of the lines instead of the last ones. Says it expresses a finer shade of contemporary significance, and that it points the way in the reaction against the abortive plunge on free verse. Freedom, he says, is of secondary importance. I suspect that he is of secondary importance. But it's all in the character — it's the modern spirit, I suppose, if there is such a thing.'

'You don't like the modern spirit, do you?'

'Of course I do. But you?'

She laughed. 'Of course I do,' she said, with just enough of mimicry to make it impossible to know what she thought.

I confess that I really had been feeling, when I began the conversation, that Sue Porter's might not be the best influence in the world for a 'starry-minded innocent' and an orphan. I was assailed with sudden doubts. 'Are you a literary person?' I asked.

'Oh, no. I have thought, perhaps, that I might go on the stage. It has always interested me.'

She was so distressingly self-assured about it that I asked her how she intended to get upon the stage. She said brightly that she didn't know; that she supposed the best way was to start with a little theater company, but that little theater companies did seem rather dull. No, she did not know any of the managers.

'So I imagine you'll just walk up and ask them for a job?'

Again she laughed. Her laugh was a low, almost a restrained laugh; it never seemed a convention with her, but the product of a genuine and perhaps a subtle amusement. 'If you don't ask you'll never get anything, I suppose,' she said. 'But just now, I'm only looking about. I want to see things. That's why I've come to live here.'

'And that's why you were sitting on a bench looking at the Washington Arch?'

'Did Sue tell you that, too? Why, yes, I suppose so. One has to begin by looking at *something*.' And I was forced to give her up.

I extracted and lit a cigarette. It seemed that some sort of commotion was going on in the middle of the room; a young man in a red shirt, seated cross-legged on the floor, had begun to read aloud to the party, and a sudden and rather constrained silence was falling upon it. As the room was cleared of sound, the voice — a very good voice — came out, and I was seized with an abrupt chill at the discovery that he was reading from 'Ulysses.' The book had just been smuggled across, and it was the first time we had encountered it. The passage wound on to its vivid climax, and I looked rather fearfully at Anne Martin. She was regarding the reader with a quietly interested meditation....

Say what you will, 'Ulysses' in its more lurid passages is not the sort of thing which can be read aloud, even yet. Some one, of course, had to snicker — I think it was Westmoreland Perkins — and though some one else immediately spilled a cocktail over the reader, and the whole business ended abruptly in a scuffle, it was, undeniably, ugly. Evil-smelling.

I looked at the girl once more. 'Is he going to read something else?' she asked.

'Heaven only knows. He probably doesn't.'

'No? Funny, isn't it?' she said, and changed the subject. It had not touched her at all. But, I suddenly perceived, that was the mystery about this girl. She was untouchable.

'Sue Porter,' I told her, 'says that we are not to corrupt you.'

'What on earth did she say that for?'

'I'm sure I don't know,' I said. 'Don't ask me to interpret the absurdities of Sue Porter's mind....

Anyway, good luck with the little theaters. I'm sure you're going to be a success.'

'Really?' she said, and smiled with, as I thought, a literally amazing sweetness.

II

This was my own impression of Anne Martin, and I give it for whatever value it may have in the solution of the enigma which she, like all other human beings, inevitably presented. I saw her only rarely afterward; what follows is her story, not mine, and the authoritativeness of my facts will have to be taken for granted, I am afraid, if the facts are taken at all. But perhaps you will admit that I had reason to be interested in her. When Sue Porter found her on a bench in Washington Square she had not come out of a convent; what she had come out of, so to speak, was the hospital in which her father had just died. She was looking, with an untroubled tranquillity, at life. And she was absolutely alone. It was an arresting combination.

Her mother had died when she was twelve. She could remember no other relatives except her paternal grandmother, who had lived in a square, solemn house with a cupola in a town in the Mohawk valley, and who had predeceased her father by some twelve months. The inheritance, after the sale of the house, came to about two thousand five hundred a year; it carried them easily through the expenses of Martin's final illness, and then falling into her hands it sufficed to give her, for the first time she had ever known it, a complete and unfettered freedom. There were no claims and no responsibilities; she had her whole life absolutely between her own two hands, and the sensation was so novel that it probably went a long

way toward compensating for whatever loss or loneliness she may have felt.

Her father's death certainly did not have the effect of stunning her. The first thing she did was to walk into a real estate office in Greenwich Village and ask to be shown apartments. They showed her a two-room place in a made-over house in Charles Street — a section of that rather crazy geography in which one so easily loses one's self between Washington and Sheridan Squares — which caught her fancy; she furnished it with a gate-legged table, Windsor chairs, rag rugs and light orange window-curtains, installed hanging ivy in the window-boxes, and prepared to face the future.

Perhaps she felt no sense of loss at all. I don't know. From the articles which he wrote one can guess that the task of being J. Charles Martin's only daughter and only companion had scarcely been a lively one. They were of a solemnly political character (he was an editorial writer and political expert), and his name above a date-line had always been, for me, a convenient guide to what was skipable. The *New York Morning Post* of course is conservative, and Martin's articles were somewhat more so; they followed a descending curve of heaviness as you went down the column, until finally he brought you to a full stop in a last paragraph of impenetrably solid platitude, and you seemed to hear a faint cheering from all the cracker-barrels. It was the pontifical attitude, and it was invariably safe. That was the reason, according to Cass Morgan, that his superiors retained him — in order to defend them against their own more lively enthusiasms.

Martin himself had begun with enthusiasms. As a

young man he had knocked about on western papers, had written satirical special articles in defense of the Populists, and in Dallas, Texas, had married, on no prospects whatever, a quiet, silently efficient girl who was the daughter of a local high-school teacher. In those days it was his ambition to make his name as an iconoclastic journalist, and she silently — and courageously — approved him. They drifted eastward to Cleveland, partly because it was on the road to New York, where Governor Roosevelt was making his glowing passage through the firmament of political reform and enlisting Martin's youthful loyalties. Martin's vision was both real and important to him, but it happened that iconoclasm was not a part of the Cleveland newspaper's policies; they made him an assistant city editor because he was a first-rate routine newspaperman, but they didn't let him write satirical articles, and after a certain time ambitions become difficult for assistant city editors, who are apt to be kept pretty busy without them.

Anne Martin was born in Cleveland. From the secure eminence of the Charles Street apartment it seemed an astonishingly long way off, astonishingly unreal. The half of the two-family frame house in which they lived appeared to her memory enormously spacious, even at the moment when she was shuddering a little to think how cramped, in how wretchedly bad taste, it must actually have been. She had been started in school there; and she recollected the impressive majesty of her first teacher — who was probably some worried child of less than her own present age. She had first become aware of people there, as individuals, and of other things. There was her calm surprise at the discovery that the sky was

not a great, inverted blue bowl, as she had naturally supposed when she heard people talking about the world's being 'round,' but was in reality simply nothing at all. This latter, of course, was an obvious impossibility. But it was also 'really, really true,' for so every one assured her. The really, really true things, then, were merely the things which any sensible person could see at once to be absurdities. She accepted this revelation, with interest but without trouble. It didn't really make any difference. She continued to believe in the blue bowl at the same time that she believed trustfully in the sky's non-existence. It may seem a difficult intellectual feat. But it was, I think, rather like her.

In the press of making their living, her father had more or less abandoned his early ideals, but he was still in their service, for he remembered them abruptly when an opportunity presented itself for a move to the staff of the *Post*. It was in Roosevelt's second administration, and the *Post* was a loyal supporter of the President who was still the idol of Martin's altruism. That must have been why he moved, because the change involved a loss both in rank and salary. But if it was, he was disappointed, because the sudden night of the Taft régime closed almost at once over the liberalism both of the *Post* and of Martin, and in New York he was compelled only to postpone his ambitions once more. Of course, if the man had actually had the fire in him, it could not have been so easily suppressed; consequently one must suppose that he had not, and avoid wasting sympathy upon him.

As if in hope of better things, however, he fell into the habit of contributing innocuous articles to the

Post's editorial page, and was sent to their Washington bureau as a reward. It was these changes which made Anne's life, for as far back as she could remember it, curiously detached. It was what she was thinking of, I suppose, when she told me that she 'did not belong anywhere.' There was no continuity about it. The little girls she played with in Cleveland simply disappeared into a void; they had no subsequent histories to affect her own. The somewhat older little boys who pulled her hair in New York were without pasts; they simply arrived upon the scene complete in all their grinning unpleasantness like Minerva in her armor, and as far as Anne was concerned they would so continue until the end of her life — grinning and unpleasant little boys, but to her memory exaggerated monstrously in size as she herself grew older and larger. The children she went to school with in Washington were like all the others — detached, objective factors, of whom it never occurred to her to think as beings just like herself.

In Washington her mother's presence was still available, dimly memorable now, in the single floor which they occupied of a high and gingerbready brick mansion behind a sleepy row of maple trees. Anne never remembered her mother very clearly, though I suppose there must have been a great deal of her mother in her. She remembered the things her mother read to her — Walter Scott, of course, and Dickens (always skipping 'what you wouldn't understand'), and the Lambs' 'Tales' and Wordsworth and Keats; and she remembered the queer society with which those readings had peopled the shadier streets of Washington. There was a certain ambitious young politician who used to go for morning rides in Rock

Creek Park, meditating whether or not he might make a good thing for himself out of the reciprocity question. Anne saw him as a cavalier, preoccupied with the problem of bringing back the six Saracens' heads, which were the price of the princess's hand. The princess, of course, was herself. To transform a flat Derby hat, secured by a string to the lapel, into a glittering helm illuminated by a lady's sleeve was difficult, but not impossible.

But it seemed that the romance, too, was detached. There was a certain little boy who used to shy notes at her over the back of his geography book, mainly because it was forbidden to pass notes. Anne read them gravely, in the spirit in which they were thrown; but she was compelled to recognize that if the little boy got caught he would unquestionably endure trials, for her sake, and she even speculated once or twice upon what he would look like in a helm. But then, coming home from school one spring afternoon she encountered three other little girls who immediately and without warning cried out: 'Annie Martin loves Dannie Thompson.'

The unexpected approach to a rhyme appeared to fascinate them, and they continued chanting loudly:

Annie Martin loves *Dannie* Thompson,
Annie Martin loves *Dannie* Thompson,
Annie Martin loves *Dannie* Thompson. . . .

Anne stood stockstill and gazed at them in astonishment. Simple, round-eyed astonishment. It was not so much that she was shocked (for she felt no sensation of shame) as it was that she was surprised. She was surprised that so great a violence could be done, in the open street, to her own private thoughts and

feelings. The little girls, somewhat surprised on their own account by the oddity of the response — they had anticipated either tears or anger — abruptly left off the chant and gazed at Anne. She passed solemnly down the street. In the distance behind her the refrain floated again mockingly upon the air:

Annie Martin loves Dannie Thompson....

She debated a consultation with her mother, and finally decided in the affirmative. 'You mustn't mind those little girls, dear,' said her mother, also gravely. 'They're — that's just — that's just foolishness with them. It doesn't mean anything. They only wanted to make you angry.'

Her mother finished a little lamely. She looked back at her daughter in what was, perhaps, rather a queer way. Anne had her mother's enormous eyes; there is a sketch of her made at about that time by a newspaper artist who was a friend of the family, and in the sketch she seems to be almost all eyes — the rest of her what might be called a 'little wisp of a thing,' with its thin stockinged legs curled under it.

At the moment Anne's eyes were extremely thoughtful, and so, I imagine, her mother's must have been as well. I suppose she realized that her daughter had felt the first touch of the erotic problem; and since it is at once the most insoluble and the most dominant of all our problems, I suppose the realization left her a little confused.

'But,' said Anne, 'I was not angry.'

'No, dear,' said her mother.

'Why did they want to make me angry?'

'Little girls just do, sometimes,' said her mother. 'You mustn't think about it.'

But Anne was thinking about it. 'Why would it make me angry to talk about Dannie Thompson, Mother?'

Her mother knew that the question was not so simple as it sounded. 'There's no reason, Anne. It doesn't matter. You will understand all about such things when you grow up.'

This last was a fatal addition. Anne perceived clearly that there was a reason, one of those obscure and mysterious 'reasons' which elder people were alsays tossing so esoterically amongst themselves. But Anne already doubted their importance. If grown-ups couldn't talk about them, they must be of no real consequence, and at any rate one's own conclusions were best. So she arrived at her own conclusions and said nothing about them. . . . Next day Dannie Thompson, instead of throwing her a note, pulled her hair violently, presumably as a means of asserting his as yet untrammeled freedom from the coils of the affections. Anne never thought of him in connection with helms again. All that sort of thing, apparently, was a matter quite apart, which could have nothing to do with real people. Real people would have to be accepted as simply a kind of cardboard figure, to be avoided in any questions of genuine importance. Anne accepted them.

It was an instinct with her, just as all her conclusions were really instinctive. It was natural to her to accept, without question, for example, the abrupt decision arrived at over her head that she should be sent to pay a long visit to her grandmother. The event was an extraordinary one; for even while they had been living in New York City there had never been enough extra money to afford the clothes and railroad

fare for such an undertaking, although her grandmother's home in the Mohawk valley was then within comparatively easy reach. All that Anne knew about it this time was that the decision seemed to have been arrived at in a mood of harassment and obscure worry. Her mother was sick in bed; and though her father was very cheerful as he explained the unusual prospect, this did not conceal from her the fact of his anxiety. He was, she concluded, 'having a reason' all by himself. 'We're not going with you, Anne, old boy,' he said. 'Philbin — you remember Mr. Philbin in New York, don't you? — he'll set you across from one train to the other, and your grandmother will meet you at the end. Not afraid, are you?'

'No,' said Anne deliberately. 'I'm not afraid.'

It was the truth; I doubt if she were ever afraid of anything in her life. She was puzzled, however. Saying good-bye to her mother turned out to be an unexpectedly solemn affair. In the train afterward there seemed to her to have been something queer about it. But as there was no way of solving the puzzle, she merely set it aside and looked out of the window. . . .

It was the summer of 1912. It is not difficult to recall the political thunders which shook various committee-rooms, corner grocery stores and newspaper offices in that memorable year. It seems that a new banner had been unfurled and a new (or repolished) trumpet had been blown; the Progressive Party platform had been etched upon the curious history of our nation, and old hopes were reviving in all the least likely of places. Anne Martin was quite unconscious of these events, in spite of the fact that her grandmother received her late at night at the station in

the midst of a political demonstration, which for one wild moment gave that old lady the appearance of going about accompanied by a private band of lunatic retainers. Her grandmother explained, rather testily, that it was 'just a parade' and had nothing to do with herself, and Anne immediately fell asleep.

Her grandmother's house, in the middle of a ragged lawn beneath a fine group of elm trees, was set back from a street which even in 1912 was already ceasing to lay claim to a 'residential' character. There was a new drug store on the corner. But the yard behind dipped down into a patch of corn, growing very green and tall to Anne's eyes, and concealing the vaguely dangerous world of 'roughs' which as her grandmother explained lay upon the other side. Provided one did not get too near the paling fence which shut off the street, and was careful not to penetrate the corn jungle *quite* as far as the barbed-wire one and the refuse heaps which marked the kingdom of the roughs, this made a most satisfactory territory for the prosecution of high romance. As a matter of fact, the only rough Anne ever saw when she did penetrate as far as the barbed wire was a bright-eyed little Spaniard with a surprisingly gentle smile, who had an infinitesimal patch of corn of his own abutting her grandmother's. He seemed desirous of entering into conversation, and extended the gift of a large ripe tomato in a courtly fashion. Anne stood upon one leg and considered both the gift and the situation. But she suddenly decided that the Spaniard would have to be classed as a 'real' person and consequently of no present advantage to her. She smiled back and vanished abruptly behind the corn-rows.

Anne's capacity for getting along by herself alarmed

her grandmother a little. She watched her with that faint and slightly pathetic dismay with which so many grandmothers make the discovery that their children's children are not at all like what the children had been. The old lady had the uncomfortable sense that she had lost touch with matters. She bestirred herself, and succeeded in introducing some neighbors' children into the yard, to keep Anne 'from getting lonely.' After listening for an hour or so to a satisfactory quantity of juvenile laughings and shoutings from the back yard, Mrs. Martin looked out to see how things were coming along. There was a furious game of prisoners' base in progress, in which every one was joyfully participating except her granddaughter. Anne was sitting wide-eyed upon the grass, looking on. She said afterward that she had had a very good time. But somehow her grandmother suddenly felt unequal to the task of introducing Anne any farther into local society, and the friendship between Anne and the other children, left to itself, failed to prosper.

Instead, Anne discovered the library. It was a dead library, cut off many years before, in a flourishing maturity, by the unfortunate demise of the elder Mr. Martin. It was full of the most amazing quantity of dead matter, defunct novels, bound volumes of long-expired magazines turned brown and unutterably dry, as if their leaves were actually the leaves of a dead forest. But a good deal of the standing timber was still thoroughly sound. Her grandmother was slow to awake to Anne's researches, and was confident anyway that the girl was too young to do more than look at the pictures. She would have been astonished to learn that her granddaughter was reading Ibsen.

Anne did not tell her merely because she felt too confused by it to feel competent to discuss the subject. She made rather heavy going of Ibsen and got no farther than 'The Doll's House'; but it was the first time she had ever encountered a play, and the form of it interested her immensely.

In fact, it was the first time she had ever encountered a library to which she was admitted without restraints. Of course, there were always plenty of books about her own family quarters, but the younger Mrs. Martin was careful; most of them were 'books you wouldn't understand just yet, dear.' Perhaps she underrated her daughter's capacity for understanding. At any rate, Anne awoke to a new fascination. She was on a continual voyage of romantic discovery. Perhaps she was too much inclined to the unscientific method of looking out the interesting illustrations and then trying to find out what they were about through the neighboring letterpress; but at least it is a method which lends itself to wide variety. Her horizon expanded. 'Europe' for the first time ceased to be a geographical expression to her; years later, when she actually found herself in London, she could not quite defend herself from a lingering surprise that the ladies did not wear bustles and the gentlemen whiskers, as they did in the volume of Du Maurier cartoons from *Punch*. But that library had another and more subtle effect. She was self-reliant enough already, Heaven knows. Here, however, was an actual case. One had only to walk into a room like that, it seemed, shut the door, and no one else mattered in the least. It was *much* more interesting than prisoners' base. But if Anne really thought thus, she omitted to tell her grandmother.

One day a boy in uniform with a pencil behind his ear rode up to the front door on a bicycle and then rode away again, whistling. At dinner that evening (dinner was rather a solemn affair, with high-backed chairs set opposite to each other across a heavy white tablecloth, and with Anne and her grandmother, when the old lady felt equal to it, gravely discussing the events of the day) Anne became conscious that her grandmother wanted to tell her something. The old lady set her steel spectacles on her forehead and looked at her granddaughter; then she replaced them upon her nose and looked at the child again; then she took them off and wiped them, and then she put them back. But it was of no use. She gave it up. Anne said, 'What, Grandmother?' almost involuntarily, and her grandmother abruptly suggested that the dishes be cleared away.

It was something to think about. . . . A few nights later Anne awoke to the unaccustomed sound of an automobile in the drive below her window. The car was backing and filling around the narrow turn with a great grinding of gears. The girl reached her window just as the automobile — one of the new taxicabs — came to a resounding halt before the door, and her father, his straw hat stuck hastily on the side of his head, got himself out into the light of the porch lamp. It was then, as her father in a nervous confusion of bag and pocketbook was paying the driver, that Anne understood that something was wrong.

Something was enormously and tremendously wrong. Something had happened. The exact manner in which she knew this remained always a mystery for her, but she knew it, and the knowledge came with the sense of an abrupt and terrible deception.

She went quietly down stairs in her nightgown and stood lost in the deep shadows of the hall, looking through the open door of the 'parlor,' furnished, as it was, with its rather absurd bric-à-brac, and the scene, as she must have appreciated it to be, of tragedy.

Her father was flung down in a heavy stuffed chair, half turned toward her, the extended fingers of his hands lying listlessly upon the end of either chair-arm, his elbows falling at the sides. In that position she could see his face well enough.

'Have you told her?'

'No,' said her grandmother, sitting near her son, but stiffly erect in her chair, her hands crossed in her lap. 'I . . . I couldn't, Charley.'

'Good God!' he said. 'Lost her mother. . . . It's unbelievable. . . . And then there's all this other . . .'

The old lady, otherwise motionless, made a quick movement of her right hand, laying it gently upon the outspread hand of her son. 'I don't understand that very well,' she said uncertainly. 'Tell me about it, Charley. Tell me some more about that.'

'It's the wind-up — finish, I guess. What's the use? If she were still here. . . . Yes, we thought we were going to do a lot. But now — what's the use?'

'Whatever you do, Charley, she will still have her part in it. I know ——'

'Where does *that* get you?' he exclaimed fiercely. And then his tone dropped to a morose weariness. 'I've thought of a lot of things, these last days,' he said. 'Ideas I hadn't had for years. It was seeing her about to — about to leave me. Good God! And then here was all this Roosevelt business. It looked as if the chance had come at last. What we used to talk about together away back there in Dallas when we

were beginning. Coming just then, too. Ma, Roosevelt's got a *great* programme. I thought the *Post* would get back of it. There's something a man could write for! . . .'

'But didn't you say ——?'

He laughed shortly. 'Yes. Wouldn't you know it? Oh, this thing's just got me. It seemed to me perhaps I hadn't done my part for her in all these years. She didn't marry a man who was going to be a damned hack in a Washington bureau. I tried to cheer her up when she got bad. I told her the paper would have to back Roosevelt this time, and that I'd turn out stuff that would *make* them sit up and take notice. I could've done it. And then the paper goes all out for Taft! Good God, the damned fools!'

I don't suppose the old lady understood very well what Roosevelt or Taft had to do with the death of her son's wife. Perhaps no one can understand fully who has not been called upon suddenly to look back from middle age upon the neglected ambitions of their youth — the supposed justification for their lives — and realized that they were looking upon them for the last time. But she must have understood something. She must have sensed that it was not wholly grief, but a moral crisis, which her son was facing.

'But this position they have offered you, Charley — it is the post I thought you always wanted. And now there's little Anne to think of ——'

'Of course,' he said. 'On the editorial page. Yes, it's what I wanted. That's the irony of it. Here they had a clear opportunity for a real piece of work. Great work! If the Progressives carry this country it would be the greatest thing that has happened to

us since Lincoln. So they decide to support Taft. And *then* they ask me to come up and write the campaign for them! It's like sewing a man up in a bag for the rest of his life. . . . But what's the use, now?' said Martin, heavily. 'I didn't give it two thoughts at the time. The doctor had just told me. And then . . . then Annie . . . died. . . . I suppose I might as well help 'em elect Taft as anybody else. Anyhow, I can do it as well as the next one.'

It was, as Martin said, ironic. For he had, all through his life, I suppose, been waiting dimly for some such post as that — a platform from which he could express the opinions which seemed to him to matter. And then it was abruptly offered to him, in the midst of this emotional crisis, in such a form that it could amount only to a muzzle.

His mother was silent. She could not understand the details of that rather mean little tragedy. But any one — any one who might have been listening — must have sensed the note of a somehow shameful surrender in his voice. The old lady understood, I imagine, that the man wanted, without being able to bring himself to ask for it, an assent of some kind from her. But she did not know what it was.

'Whatever you do will be for the best, Charley,' she said at length. 'And if you do as you think right, Anne will still be with you. You must let that comfort you.'

It was not this that he wanted. He did not want to be told to do what was right. 'It's hard,' he said. His wife's death had brought the old illusions back too vividly in his mind; the new position on the *Post* meant security and ease and a certain dignity, but it

was not easy to turn his back upon those shadows of his younger manhood.

'There's little Anne,' said his mother. 'It is she whom you must think of now.'

His daughter, standing in the hallway, saw his eyes shift restlessly and miserably about the room.

'Of course,' he said, 'if I turn this down, I'll never get anything else from the *Post* people, I suppose.'

'You mean you might go on another paper?'

'It would be risky,' said Martin.

'I suppose you can't afford to take risks now,' said his mother.

'Too risky,' said Martin, rather hurriedly. 'No, no. I've got to think of Anne, of course. The other is all just foolishness.'

'But it *is* a great recognition for your work, Charley?'

He got heavily out of the chair and took two or three turns, up and down the room. 'God!' he said. 'I wish *I* had died.' And then, 'Yes, I imagine it is.'

'You mean that you will accept it?'

He stopped abruptly, with a sudden exclamation. 'Fact is, Ma, I already *have* accepted it,' he said. 'I stopped in on the way up here, and told them. It was on account of Anne,' he lied. 'Poor kid. Otherwise I'd have got out. But no use now. I'm going back soon. Mustn't stop to think about things.'

It was his surrender. A surrender which he had been ashamed to confess to before. He had said good-bye to the illusion. Any one could have seen it; seen it in his figure, in the set of his shoulders. His mother raised her hand, as if she would recall the finality of his admission. But she dropped it again.

'No,' she said, 'you mustn't think about things.' She paused. 'And there's little Anne, now. . . .'

Her son nodded, and turned away. 'Must get some sleep,' he said. On the threshold of the room he found himself stopped, stockstill, before the pale, small face of his daughter, in her white nightgown, staring solemnly and silently at him from the shadows with the great round eyes of his dead wife.

Father and daughter simply stood there, looking at each other, for perhaps as much as a minute.

'Why,' she asked slowly, and her voice must have sounded very little and queer indeed from the great black cavern of the hall, 'why didn't you *tell* me that my mother was going to die?'

The man was unable to answer her.

III

Thus it was Anne Martin's unusual, and rather terrifying, fate to witness the birth of her own father. For that was the beginning of 'J. Charles Martin,' the man who wrote the heavy political articles, the man who in the *New York Morning Post* office slowly passed from being a bore into being an institution, the man whom the youngsters supposed to know everything and to believe in nothing, the man, finally, who in the decade that followed managed to efface from Anne Martin's mind the memories of that earlier father who had not lost the illusion. For Martin had made his compromise, and he spent the rest of his life in the attempt to justify it. Bereavement, of course, has its differing effects upon different men; it is as difficult for man to break his heart against a bereavement as it is for him voluntarily to break his head against a wall, but if few ever find the courage to let their hearts be crushed, many must know the cowardice of abandoning them.

Martin's efforts on the *Post's* editorial page did not, of course, suffice to elect Mr. Taft, but his superiors understood the value of the instrument they had discovered. 'They knew all about that benny,' Cass Morgan once told me. 'He could write — they knew that — and they knew he'd go on writing what they told him to until he died, keep their damned policy straight, and be safe. He was never a big gun with them, afterward, but he was a kind of little tin god; they paid him a good-sized salary and he took it without a flicker because ——'

'Because what?'

'Because he was done,' said Morgan abruptly. 'Played out. Finished.' It was, of course, the truth. Important conservative newspapers can no more be produced by hacks than can any other vital enterprise, but nevertheless, there is a place for such men in their organizations. The man who is too tired, or too disillusioned, or too much aware of his own limitations — the man who presents no danger of sudden or reckless enthusiasms — can be very useful as a kind of balance-wheel. Martin had made his compromise; his position on the *Post* was assured from that moment, and during the rest of his life he never took a step of any kind which might shake it.

Anne Martin, from the profound shadows of her grandmother's hallway, had seen the transformation — or rather, since transformations of this sort are only the slow products of years, had seen her father's abrupt admission to himself that the transformation had taken place. Did she understand it? The answer must be, I think, in the affirmative. 'Why didn't you *tell* me ——?' was what she asked, and the question must have sprung from a shaken confidence. It marked, at any rate, the moment of her discovery — a discovery inevitable for all children — that her father was no more than a man like any other man. That is a sufficiently disturbing experience, even when it happens gradually. With Anne it happened all at once, in the midst of the greatest shock she had ever suffered. . . .

Fancy what she must have felt! Her father was unable to answer her. He merely stood there in the doorway, his hands working nervously. Her grandmother came up beside him. 'We must put you back to bed

now, Anne.' Her father stooped suddenly and gathered her up in his arms. 'The front room,' she heard her grandmother say. All the way up the long stairs — dark and queerly shadowed because her grandmother with the lamp was coming behind and below them — she had the sense of being in a strange place, in the arms of a stranger. Her father did not say a word. Nor did Anne. She did not cry. Her father laid her back among the chilled bedclothes. 'You must get some sleep, Charley. Go on now. I'll stay here.' Her father left the room as if he had been pushed out of it. Her grandmother drew a chair up to the bed. 'Now you must try to go to sleep, dear. Don't think about these things. Not now. I'll just stay here with you. You will like that, won't you?'

'Yes,' said Anne.

Well, she did not go to sleep, not for a long time, but lay there staring at the footboard. So it seemed that people were not told things, then. They just happened to one suddenly, in the night, like this. And then everything was different. And her father.... And her mother.... But she had no mother, now. She could not understand that. But she had no one any more. There was just herself. Martin was never the same after that night. Nor, I believe, was Anne.

He carried her back with him to New York, against a half protest from her grandmother. He explained that she was old enough. 'She will be a little housekeeper for me, too. It'll keep us both from brooding.' Thus they began their life together; and it was not, I imagine, the best influence in the world for her. It meant that almost her only companion was a disappointed and dissatisfied man, erecting a heavily pompous façade over the grave of a secret failure.

He took an apartment on Columbia Heights, that strangely unexpected little pool of quiet lying just above the mighty highway of the East River. The lofty and jeweled skyline of lower New York, wreathed in the light smokes and mists of its perpetual activity, shaded and shadowed under its clear or cloudy skies, rose amazingly upon the opposite shore. The romance of that astounding panorama had its effect upon Anne. After dark upon a winter afternoon the countless tiers of lights glowing from the dim shapes of the buildings gave them an appearance of exquisite transparency, of a gossamer construction appropriate only to those great cities of gold and opal which poets used to amuse themselves by imagining. And when she would climb up into a back window of their apartment to watch some vast and romantic sunset glowing incredibly behind the high towers of the city; when she saw the barges and tugs and ferryboats going back and forth under the lofty tracery of Brooklyn Bridge, a battleship forging slowly up to the Navy Yard, or the great steamers going down to the sea, when she heard the whistles and the distant rattle of trains and the deep roar of the vast population before her, it appealed to her imagination with the mystic force of an enormous and obscure parable. The illimitable activities of men, etched against the illimitable beauty of that sky and cloud beneath which all men live. Perhaps it diminished her need for more immediate contacts.

Sometimes she would hurry home from school in order to witness some particularly brilliant sunset. And if another girl asked her why she was hurrying, she would instantly invent the most flagrant of falsehoods with which to reply. She never forgot the limi-

tations of 'real' people; and the self-defense came so automatically that she hardly realized that she was lying.

Columbia Heights. A strange backwater, which nevertheless looks down upon all the world. Not many people ever came there; it's a troublesome business getting through the tunnels, and I suppose that Martin had already begun to shirk visitors. Once or twice he took somebody from the office over to dinner, as happened to Philbin, who found Anne staring with a grave curiosity at him from a level not much above the tablecloth as she served him with soup. 'Do you think,' she said suddenly, 'that the Russians ought to have mobilized?' — which took Philbin so much aback that he nearly dropped the soupplate. Anne was fourteen at that time, but small for her age, and Philbin had been on the point of asking after her dollies. But the question did not seem to perturb her father. 'It's a point Anne and I have discussed,' he said, with the heavy solemnity which had begun to grow markedly upon him. 'It's questionable, I know. Have you read the *Staats-Zeitung*? But on the broad view there can be no doubt ——' And Philbin found himself engaged for the rest of the evening upon the origins of the war, a subject which as a matter of fact interested him very little. When he went home he could not resist some speculation upon the daily life in that odd household.

Not many people ever came there. But Anne did not exactly develop the mentality of a recluse. People interested Anne, in her own way. Philbin's visit, as it happened, occurred at about the time she had made a new discovery concerning people. You could feed questions into them, as you fed pennies into the sub-

way slot-machines, and get all the most astonishing results in return. It was a fascinating occupation — much more fascinating than the real slot-machines, which possessed only limited possibilities. With them, you either got chocolate or else you didn't. With people you might get almost anything. She developed an astonishing ingenuity in it.

She even tried it on her father. In fact, it was her early experiments in the art which first led to their sober arguments on the weighty subjects about which Martin wrote his editorials. He thought she was showing a gratifying interest, and he began to quote them to her. Her most striking success with her father, however, came upon the evening when she looked up innocently in the midst of a lecture upon the Adamson Act to ask: 'But, Father, why doesn't everybody else believe the things you say as much as you do?'

It floored him — it absolutely floored him; because of course, he did not believe the things which he said. Not in his heart. But he could no longer afford to admit the fact, even to himself.

'Because,' his daughter gravely observed, 'I was reading a piece in the *Nation* to-day that said, "We cannot blame the editorial-writers of papers like the *Morning Post* for the incredible stupidity of the arguments to which their owners' policies bind them." Or something like that.'

'The easiest thing in the world,' said Martin stiffly, 'is to call a man stupid when you haven't got any better reply to him.'

'Oh,' said Anne.

But privately she scored one for her side.

It was not a pleasant way in which to regard one's

parent. But perhaps the pontifical attitude could be expected to produce its own antidote. And Martin was getting more and more pontifical. It was about this time that he began to branch out into those long, explanatory signed articles which later became so familiar to the readers of the *Morning Post*. He may have smiled at himself occasionally, but with others he would maintain an air of irritable omniscience. Or else he would develop the most unexpected sorts of prejudices on the most unlikely of subjects. Baseball, for instance. You had only to mention baseball to Martin, and he would burst out into startling tirades against the imbecile fools who disgraced American life by going to baseball games and — it appeared to be their crowning sin — drinking pop. For twenty minutes on end.

Once Martin, for some unexplained reason, brought home to dinner a youngster from the dramatic page. A fellow in spectacles, with a slightly florid face — not by any means a handsome man, but a remarkably cheerful one. He was working on the newspaper only until such time as he might attain fame as a dramatist; he had already had one play produced, with disastrous results, on Broadway, was trying to sell a second, and was writing a third. He may have been about thirty years old.

The question Anne found to put into him was: 'Why didn't your play run more than three nights, Mr. Stubbs?' Her intention was not, I think, at all unkind; the trouble was that she was guided by what might be called a purely scientific interest. It was simply that she really wanted to see what would happen.

'Because it was a rotten play,' said Stubbs, with

imperturbable equanimity. 'Ought to have run only one. Next time, though, it'll run three months. And the time after that, three years. You wait, young lady.'

'Oh,' exclaimed Anne, 'I'm *sure* it will!' And immediately she wondered, in an abrupt confusion, why on earth she had said that. It was not in the least what she had intended.

'Thanks,' remarked the young man, looking at her through his spectacles with a slightly warmer interest. 'Hope you're a better critic than I am.'

Anne, with a shyness which she felt to be unfamiliar to her, explained her interest in plays, and that she liked to read them. When she told him of her first contact with Ibsen (and it was the first time she had ever told any one of that incident) he hitched his chair perceptibly closer. They had quite a conversation; Martin interpolating the ineffectually jocose remarks of parents who find themselves left out of something. Anne felt it to be a very exciting conversation. Stubbs asked her if she was ever in the city? Sometimes, for one reason or another. Wouldn't she lunch with him? It was a startling moment. The first time anything of that sort had ever happened to her.

Stubbs did take her to lunch. He took her to the theater. More than once. It was all very amazing. He even told her something about his new play — the one he was writing. It was to be called 'The Hard-Boiled Egg,' unless the producers decided to change it. Anne saw visions of electric signs with the words 'The Hard-Boiled Egg' in letters of enormous height, and with innumerable people pouring through the doors below. She saw the kind of things the reviewers

would say. She even looked out the various critics and amused herself one afternoon by making up glowingly complimentary reviews in their differing styles. It was a strangely pleasant occupation.

What Hogarth Stubbs didn't tell her about his new play was that one of its characters was to be a fifteen-year-old girl. After becoming acquainted with Anne he even changed the idea a little, to make the girl fall in love with one of the middle-aged characters, in the way that young girls so frequently do. It gave him just what he wanted for those vacant ten minutes in the second act. The second act was completed, and since Stubbs found himself an increasingly busy man, there happened to be no more invitations, either to luncheon or to the theater. In the course of time the farcical comedy, 'The Hard-Boiled Egg,' *was* produced, with a sign of enormous height, just off Broadway. Anne, buying herself a single ticket, went to see it. . . .

Unfortunately, she had a good memory for her own conversation.

But Anne had already learned that in this life things just happened, that you were not told about them beforehand, and that when they happened they had to be accepted. It was so that her father's illness happened, which meant care and nursing and the difficult contact with irritabilities and exasperations. I don't know what the man had. The trouble was that it stayed with him; it never disabled him, but from that time on he was really an invalid, and of course it was upon Anne's small shoulders that the weight of his invalidism fell. He himself never knew how heavily, simply because Anne never told him. It was of no use talking about it.

It was true that more pleasant things also happened with an equal lack of warning. It was in the early days of 1919 that the owners of the *Morning Post* suddenly awoke to the highly intricate and difficult channels which seemed to be opening before Republican newspapers. Martin perceived the situation, and prepared a series of powerful articles upon the lurking dangers in Mr. Wilson's methods of treaty-making. His owners read them with interest and, remembering old Charley Martin's unshakable soundness, despatched him abruptly to Europe.

And so Anne found herself in Paris; and went through that whole weird spring and summer there, in the strange dawn of the new world. The astounding flotsam of nondescripts — nondescript people, nondescript ideas, and emotions and moralities — washed back and forth along the boulevards, while civilization was being saved at Versailles and a reprieved soldiery celebrated the event nightly in Montmartre. By this time, of course, she was a woman — about nineteen. When she discovered that *La Vie Parisienne* actually was sold at all the magazine stalls where any one could buy it she secured a few copies and gravely contemplated the subject. She got an acquaintance to take her to the Folies Bergères . . . And she was astonished by the facility with which she was picking up people. They simply drifted against one and drifted away again. Reporters, ambulance-girls, officers, newspaperwomen, hangers-on, cranks . . . Americans, mostly, and some English people. They talked in the most arresting fashion. For years Anne's reading had been both voracious and untrammeled. But this was not reading.

'Of course,' she remembered one tall and hawklike Englishwoman, a journalist, remarking, 'you mustn't be a silly little fool about it. But if you use a bit of common-sense. . . . There was one of your American girls, went home the other day, with a baby coming. But that,' and the Englishwoman finished her cognac, 'is just playing the giddy fool.'

'Take what you want. My motto.' This was from a rather hard-eyed but dashing young woman recently demobbed from the entertainment branch of the American Y.M.C.A. and still wearing the uniform. 'Only thing — be damned sure it's what you want.'

'Be damned well, jolly sure it's what you want,' said the Englishwoman.

'There was that ghastly little idiot in the camion service. You know,' said the American, 'yellow hair.' The other nodded. 'Told poor Henri she wouldn't marry him. After the poor kid had flown all the way back from Germany in a condemned Camel because he'd made a date to hear her answer. No good. Nothing doing. Sister to you. Henri breaking out in tears — tears, do you get that? — with five million francs a minute and he's one of the sweetest children I ever saw in uniform. What if she did marry him? There're divorce courts, aren't there? Well, a week later I went up to her place in the Rue Jacob. It was some unutterable little hop-toad in the S.O.S. Haberdashery salesman from Little Rock, Arkansaw, I guess. Had to back out in a hurry. They were half undressed then. Might at least lock the door, the idiot.'

The Englishwoman nodded. 'Funny things we are — women.'

'Yes,' said the American. 'But it's no use being a plain fool.'

Anne, who hadn't been in the Y.M.C.A. or the camion service or anywhere else, looked placidly as if she had. She was quite sure that there was nothing, in fact, behind those two rather common faces which gave them a claim to any greater authority than she herself possessed. Anne was rather like that. But the point of view was sufficiently novel to her. 'Take what you want. My motto.' Anne did not know what she wanted, but she knew that she did not want to be left tending an irritable invalid in the restricted atmosphere of a Left Bank hotel. Her father read his despatches over to her sometimes. They seemed to her astonishingly flat, remarkably opaque to these enormous events which they were supposed to be transmitting. She would have to attend to his wants, read newspapers to him often, sometimes take his dictation or go on errands. It was a harassing occupation. And it frequently seemed to Anne as if there were something very big and significant close about her, which was somehow slipping through her fingers. . . .

It was when she was coming back to their hotel one evening over the Pont des Arts that she paused to watch a summer moonrise. The moon, just coming up between the two groups of buildings and trees on either bank, precisely over the dark ribbon of the river, was so immense, so round, so deep a gold, that she gasped in a sheer astonishment. That she should happen to see it so exactly at its full and so exactly over the water had the effect of some profound and inexplicable portent. The traffic noises — the absurd and irritating tooting of the Paris taxicabs — swept

by at a remote distance on either side of her. The lights, the dark outlines of massed foliage, the long silhouettes of famous buildings, the reflections, the silent glide of a towboat — it was too lovely, too perfect, of too fairylike and impossible a quality quite to be endured. Anne, leaning there against the bridge railing, feeling that perhaps she wanted a great deal from life, but not knowing what it was, might easily have cried. But Anne never cried. Instead — it was a characteristic impulse — she raised her head and looked about her. A few feet away an American Army officer, his overseas cap set gallantly against the side of his head, was leaning over the same railing, looking at the same moon.

Afterwards, Anne could never remember what it was that moved her to speak to him. She had never done that sort of thing before, not even since she had come to Paris. There must have been some reason. But it was like the reasons for which we do things in dreams.

'Yes, by George, it *is* pretty slick, isn't it?' was the officer's reply. He was rather a young officer, even as officers went at the close of the war. Anne saw the lieutenant's bar on his shoulder and the crossed guns of the artillery against his collar. His collar fitted him very well, she thought; and there was a kind of neatness about the firm musculature of his neck and the way in which his chin was set above the strip of white neckband over the khaki. She liked to look at it.

'Mooning,' said the officer. 'That's what you call it, isn't it?'

Anne smiled, dimly, but as the officer thought with a surprising loveliness. 'I suppose so,' she said. 'And so I was mooning, too, then.'

'Preposterous, isn't it?' said the officer. 'They say the fellows in the trenches used to swear every time there was a full moon. . . .'

'Did you?'

'Wasn't in the trenches,' said the officer abruptly. 'Too late, you see.' Anne found that his face was worth looking at, as well as his collar. It was a cleanly modeled face, with a thin and sensitive nostril, and rather a sharpened look beneath the single curl of hair that cropped out around the overseas cap. The shadow of an obscure embarrassment seemed to fall upon it, and he went on hurriedly. 'I only landed the first of November. I did all my fighting in the training camps. Which is the glorious reply I shall make when my children (if any) ask me what *I* did in the Great War.'

'Are you sorry?' said Anne, remembering as she said it her old game of putting questions in the slot-machines. But this, she recognized, was a different kind of curiosity; for she found that she really did want to know whether in fact this boy was sorry.

'Sorry to be out of all that muck? No. I'm no fool, nor a Spartan. But don't you see? It was the big time for my generation. One of the things we all did together. One of the things any man of my age ought to have been in. If you ask me whether I'm sorry not to have had my share — why, yes, I am. I always will be, I suppose. But you must know all about that.'

'I?'

'You were a nurse or a canteen girl or something?'

'No. I've just come over. Later than you.'

'You know,' said the officer suddenly, 'if you had been a nurse and if I had been in it and had got

wounded — well, well I'd liked to have been nursed by you!'

'Really?' said Anne.

'Eh — really,' said the officer.

'It wasn't your fault that you didn't get into the fighting.'

'No,' said the officer.

They looked at the moon. It was beginning to lift clear; its profound orange was already fading into a fine white gold.

'You feel sold out in some way. Something's got by you. What a beastly mess it all is,' said the officer. 'Look here, did you ever live in Chicago?'

'No,' said Anne. 'Why?'

'I do. Or did. Don't know where I'll live now.'

The vague trouble did not seem to lift from him. A kind of irresolute but in some way appealing incompleteness. Anne felt that she understood men very thoroughly. She found herself wondering, for the first time in all her life, whether she understood herself very well.

'Look here,' said the artilleryman suddenly, 'this show's over. Let's go on up to Montmartre. What d'you say?'

What Anne did say was: 'All right.'

Montmartre. A dense crowd. Champagne. Gay people looking bored and bored people looking gay. The post-war atmosphere.

'They don't know what they're doing,' said the officer. 'And — and they're *not* on their way. That's the trouble.'

'Tell me about Chicago,' said Anne.

'There's not much to tell.' But he did tell her all the same. It seemed that he had lived there most of

his life, in rather a quiet way. Anne gathered that his father had independent means. 'Old man's a sort of researcher,' he explained. 'Does things in geology, and writes monographs about 'em for the scientific papers. They're the kind of paper you never even saw. Dad's stuff is all to the good though. I'm an engineer myself. That is, I would have graduated from Massachusetts Tech last spring if it hadn't been for the war.'

But that brought him back to the war again. It was all a mess. Central Europeans 'acting like pie-eyed idiots all over the place.' They were going to make a hash of the peace conference if they didn't look out. There was no order, no *arrangement* about it. Anne did not grasp all this very well. But the boy went on. It was different with his father's geology, 'where you always knew where you were.'

'Or with my grandfather, for instance,' he said. 'He helped to build the U.P.— the Union Pacific Railroad. Now that was making a new world for you, because they really did make a new world, and it was war, too, on a small scale.' Somebody popped a champagne cork close by; a paper streamer floated across the table. Anne felt a certain weird confusion of ideas. But the boy went on, with a kind of glowing earnestness. 'But with all that you knew what you were about. You went out and laid down so many feet of track per day, and if anybody got in the way, why, you banged him with a six-shooter. Ten minutes off for the funeral, and so many feet of track per day. They knew what they were doing. And by George, he exclaimed, 'they did it, too! But now. . . .

'Oh, Lord,' said the officer. 'What an unmitigated fool I'm making of myself. Want to dance?'

They danced. Or rather, they stood up for a while, jammed between a Czecho-Slovakian captain and a minor clerical expert from the British peace delegation with their respective ladies, swaying in time to the orchestra until some one discovered that the orchestra had stopped. It was not quite satisfactory. But she liked it.

'Oh, Lord,' said the boy. 'I missed it all. Just my luck anyway. I say, where do you come from? . . .'

It was refreshingly cool in the taxi afterward. The moon was very far away by this time, and very small and bright above them — but it was the same moon.

'Look here,' said the boy. 'What'd you speak to me for? — on the bridge, I mean.'

'Because I wanted to,' said Anne.

'Awfully glad you did,' said the boy. The night air was clear, enormously clear around them. One's thoughts, one's moods, were lifted into a high crystalline clarity.

The taxi stopped. The officer was gazing at her in a way that to Anne seemed suddenly very strange. She looked about. 'This isn't my hotel,' she said.

'Eh?' said the officer. He abruptly roused himself, craned his neck, looked back at her. 'No,' he said. 'Of course not. Damfool driver. Hi there! *Ecoutez! Plus loin.* Beat it!'

They reached the correct hotel. The boy helped her out upon the sidewalk and jangled the night-bell.

'So long,' he said. 'Thanks.'

'Shall I see you again?'

'No. 'Fraid not. Got my orders home, and I'm leaving Tuesday.'

'Good luck, then,' said Anne, paused, and then

found herself adding, 'even if you don't want to see me again.'

'It's not that——' he protested, gazing at the pavement. Then he raised his eyes abruptly. 'Wasn't the driver's fault, just now,' he said hurriedly. 'Fact was, I gave him the wrong address.'

Anne, clothed in the moonlight, looked her question.

'You know,' he said, 'I was going to ask you — to ask you to go home with me. . . .'

He stepped back abruptly.

But Anne held him with her large eyes. The door clicked under her hand; she pushed it slightly ajar, and hesitated.

'Why didn't you?' said Anne Martin.

It is to the boy's credit that he did not misunderstand that question. He looked quickly into the cool purity of her face, and read there the truth — that she genuinely wished to know.

'You are too lovely,' he told her, quite simply. 'It just wouldn't have — wouldn't have fitted. You don't know how lovely you are. Oh, Lord,' he said, 'good-night.' And he sprang swiftly into the taxi-cab. . . .

Her father wanted to know where she had been. She told him that she had been dancing with a friend at Montmartre. 'You mustn't do that,' said her father irritably. 'It's a bad place. Who was he?' 'Nobody you know,' said Anne. During the whole of the evening it had never occurred to them to tell each other their names. 'I don't like that,' said her father, 'you mustn't do it, Anne.' 'No,' said Anne, and she went to her own room. She sat awake there by the window, until the dawn began to pale against the op-

posite wall. She wished that he had answered her question more fully, because she wanted to know about him, and about herself. But perhaps questions of that kind could never be answered? . . .

In all the rest of the time they were in Paris, nothing of that sort happened again. Her father, for one thing, made heavier demands upon her. Perhaps he realized that she was slipping from him, and hence did so intentionally, as the only method which he could invent by which to govern the queer inscrutability which he found in her. He knew that he did not understand his daughter; and he may have been assailed by the suspicion that she did understand him. Anne was perfectly uncomplaining.

The peace conference came to its conclusion, and the battle was joined in America. Martin's articles had done their part in preparing the ground and supplying ammunition; the *Morning Post* cabled for him to come home and continue the work. Martin considered this cable during the course of a morning, and then, pleading his health, asked to be left on in Europe. It was an unexpected resolution; he explained to Anne that he wished more fully to study the foreign field. She said nothing, but it did not seem to her that this was the explanation. However, they did remain for a time in Paris, and then wandered on nomadically through other capitals. To Anne it became, on the whole, an oppressive existence. She felt that she could easily devote her life to some single object, even to some one man if things should happen in that way, but to her father — no. Not to J. Charles Martin. . . .

However, it was not until the end of 1922 that her father, after a consultation in a doctor's office, sud-

denly put a rider on one of his cables asking to be returned to the United States. This time, at least, his health was not a pretext. They sailed in November; and both of them knew the reason.

There were some long conversations between them, overshadowed by the approaching fact, although never referring to it. They would lie out in deck-chairs, heavily bundled up, and talking as the ship rolled through a stormy sea and the wind whistled in the funnel-guys.

'What did you think, Anne,' he once asked her bluntly, 'of my articles on the conference? I mean, what did you really think, how did they strike you?'

'I don't know . . .' she said, and when he pressed her, with a curious earnestness: 'I don't know,' she repeated. 'I thought they weren't, may be, very generous.'

'Of course that'll be said about them . . .' he began testily, but checked himself. 'Do you remember,' he asked, in a different tone, 'that night when I came to your grandmother's — when you came downstairs in your nightgown?'

'Yes,' said Anne. 'I remember. I could hardly help remembering.'

'You asked me something,' he went on, without looking at her. 'You were a tiny little thing, standing there in that hall. You asked me why I hadn't *told* you . . .'

'Yes.'

'I never answered you,' said Martin. 'But how could I? Sometimes I think that it's not the only question I haven't answered in these last ten years.'

'What is in your mind?' said his daughter.

But he still had the air of talking to himself rather

than to her. 'Perhaps I took you away with me after that partly because — in a way — I was afraid of you.'

His daughter merely turned her eyes upon him, without reply.

'How did I know that you would understand?' he asked, as if he were wearied. 'I guess I haven't come out precisely where I intended to, Anne. Not where I intended to when I married your mother.'

There was a long pause. Anne sensed that he was making his justification before her. She would have liked to accede, tacitly. But quite suddenly she realized that it was impossible to her. Her thoughts seemed to go deeply down within her, and to strike upon a queer vein of hardness there. She said nothing.

'Those articles on the treaty,' he said. 'They're sound enough. I know it's the best piece of work I've ever done in my life. But it wasn't what I had wanted to do. I used to be on the other side.'

'I have often thought so,' said Anne slowly.

He burst out at that. 'It was fate, Anne, accident! It all happened at once, just as your mother died, and got me off my guard. But who's going to understand that? Who ever does? It takes too much explaining. When they asked me to go back to the States two years ago, I knew I was squarely facing it. Well, I didn't want to go back. It was because of those articles.'

'I thought it might have been,' said his daughter.

'It's nothing I'm ashamed of,' he said. Only — only it has come out differently.'

She nodded.

'It was not my fault,' he said. 'It was not.'

She wanted to agree with him. It was a small

thing, and he was a sick man and her father. But she was unable to frame the monosyllable. Because she knew that what he had said was not the truth. She had never forgiven her father for that compromise; and she could not forgive him now for asking her assent to it.

She wished wretchedly that he had not spoken. 'It does not seem to me,' she said, 'that it was worth worrying about. You have to take things as they come, I suppose.'

'You have to do what's right, daughter,' he said uncertainly.

'Do you?' she asked. 'Do you? . . . But if there isn't any right . . . I think, father, you have to do what's sensible. You can't do any more.'

It was, I suppose, her confession of faith. The ship rolled down, there was a great spread of spray to leeward, and Martin gave it up. He did not know whether his daughter understood him. He never again tried to find out. . . .

Some months later Anne Martin walked out of a hospital into the spring sunshine of Washington Square. Her emotions were confused, but the one which afterward seemed to her to have predominated was the sudden sense that she was free. Alone, and absolutely free.

IV

She came to Greenwich Village under the spell of its romantic reputation. She had no very clear idea of what she was going to do there, nor how; she was 'just looking at things.' She did not know what there was to be made out of life, but she intended, as she surveyed the future through her large and contemplative eyes, to make something out of it, and it is impossible, I think, to doubt the integrity of that intention. She had no misgivings. Greenwich Village was the most promising territory she could think of, and ultimate success seemed to her a matter only of common-sense and an appreciation of realities. Her father's failure, she thought, was the result of an inability to appreciate realities, and her father's was the only example which she had. It was with a confiding honesty that she accepted the invitation which life appeared to proffer her; and her two-room apartment in Charles Street became the opening page of a romance in which anything might happen — provided only that one stuck to facts.

Or it became — if you will allow a simile which certainly would never have occurred to Anne — the basket of a free balloon. A free balloon is guided by no definite principles and propelled by no inner convictions, but if its pilot understands how to accommodate himself to the facts of the world's winds, it will go a long way over the most varied and interesting of terrain before it is finally, like everything else, brought to earth. Anne may have been an opportunist, but opportunism has its greatness; free-balloon

pilots, like the pilots of any other craft, must be men of honesty and good faith and no cowardice.

It was Cass Morgan, oddly enough, who first described this apartment to me. It seemed that in spite of his universal contempts he had actually gone to call on her.

'She's a courageous little rascal,' he said abstractedly. 'She hasn't any people. Not a soul. But it doesn't worry her — not so's you'd notice it.'

I said that the novelty of the situation hadn't worn off yet. 'Maybe,' said Morgan.

'She struck me,' I said, 'as being rather naïve.'

'Oh, I guess she's naïve enough. She's trailed along after Sue Porter just like a kid trailing into a jam closet. You know — they're always so innocent about it. She told me all about it. She says she finds that gang of Sue's "amusing."'

'You appear to have had something of a conversation.'

'Oh, yes,' said Morgan. 'I can always talk to people who are as easy to look at as she is. And she gave me tea — can you imagine me as a tea-fighter? — in her pretty little room with its pretty little curtains and all her nice new furniture. She's got herself regularly installed; waiting for the world to make tracks to the door, I suppose. Don't know what else she expects.'

'Well, you seem to have made tracks there.'

'Yes. . . . Have another drink?'

I own that I was considerably surprised. As a matter of fact I could not very easily imagine Morgan as a tea-fighter, or as making tracks to any young lady's door. It occurred to me that it represented something of a triumph for Miss Martin.

But then, I really knew very little about the man. He might have been in the habit of spending every afternoon of his life taking tea with young ladies. His full name was Casimir. Casimir Morgan. It supplied, even amid the usual wild irrelevance of American names, the air of a provoking incognito. The surname suggested a Welsh ancestry; but the 'Casimir' seemed to suggest almost anything that you might wish. He seemed to have innumerable acquaintances, but no friends whatever, unless (which was on the whole rather doubtful) I might have been so classified. He appeared to have no history, and he himself often announced that he was devoid of a future. He was tall, and shaggy and middle-aged and awkward, and he was just there. He existed. Shaggy eyebrows, a shaggy sort of tweed suit with the trousers invariably out of press, shaggy manners, and his perpetual slangy scornfulness. His contempt for women, in particular, amounted to a kind of stupid mania. He quoted Schopenhauer and H. L. Mencken, and seemed to regard the female sex in the light of a conspiracy. Since he was also observed to have a comfortable income, people said, as they usually do, that he must have suffered an early disappointment in love.

My discovery of his interest in Anne Martin was made late one night, in his office. Morgan had evidently spent much of his life as a newspaperman, but he had given that up at an indefinite period in the past, and now had an office of his own—an extraordinary hole in a little left-over house somewhere down among the tall buildings behind Madison Square. I used to drop in on him occasionally. The calling-hour was along about midnight, because it seemed to be the only time that he was ever there.

One went up a narrow wooden stairway, to be confronted on the landing by a ground-glass panel bearing the announcement 'Constellation Publicity' with a lively little flock of stars underneath in gilt paint, and with 'Casimir Morgan' in small letters at the bottom. I don't know why, but the effect always seemed to me vaguely oriental. Inside one found blank whitewashed walls, an astonishingly low ceiling, and an enormous iron soup-kettle — three feet across the top — in a corner. Under a green tin-shaded drop-light there was a sort of barricade made up of an old typewriter desk, a kitchen table and a filing-case; behind the barricade Morgan would establish himself, usually with his feet up, and throw his cigarette stubs into the iron kettle. I suppose that he was 'Constellation Publicity.' If so, he was the most reticent publicity man that I have ever known.

Nor do I know what sort of publicity business it is which can regularly be conducted between the hours of eleven and one at night, though I must admit that even in those hours I never actually saw him conducting any. The top drawer of the filing-case was always occupied by a bottle of Scotch, and a siphon; and I don't know what was in the other drawers because I never saw him open them. He would concoct Scotch highballs for as long as I would consume them; throw innumerable cigarette butts into the soup-kettle, and discourse upon whatever subjects his cynicism suggested, until I went home. Frequently I would be unable to remember precisely what it was that he had said, but I know that it always seemed to have been something on the whole unpleasant. I used to think of the place as a kind of den. The house has been torn down since. . . .

I did have another drink. 'The girl's man-hunting,' said Morgan. 'It's all the little dears have to fill their pretty heads with. The Porter woman's the same way. But this one will get the man all right — as soon as she wakes up to the fact that she wants him.'

'Then you mean the pursuit is unconscious?'

'Unconscious? Yah. They all know what they want. Only they're such everlasting liars they're incapable of admitting it to 'emselves. That's what makes 'em dangerous. Look at that now — here's a girl absolutely let loose on New York — nobody to whack her when she needs it — it's immoral. There ought to be a police regulation about it, except that most men are too much sap-headed fools to make it worth even a policeman's time protecting 'em. She'll annex somebody sooner or later, I know. Sorry for him.'

'Why so?'

'Why? Oh, you know why.'

But I did not. It was the peculiar force of the man's cynicism. He made these banalities sound as if he really had detected some atrocious danger in that girl's innocent presence in a Greenwich Village apartment. But he did not tell me what it was. The tin lampshade, directly above his head, threw his gaunt features into a curious contrast of lights and deep shadows. 'I knew a girl once,' he began, and launched into some profane illustration of the frailties of women. I forget now what it was all about. 'Ought to have had more *sense!*' he concluded angrily. 'But I guess it was about the year 49 B.C. I gave up expecting human animals to have any sense. Want another drink?'

He heaved himself from his chair and began

measuring out the whiskey. It was a silly thing to do — sitting in that rather stuffy whitewashed room at half-past twelve at night, listening to Morgan's absurd generalizations about women. At least, so it seemed in retrospect. But there was something about the man. I don't know. One did not seem to be in New York at all. It was the lowness of the ceiling, perhaps, the bareness of the walls, and that extraordinary iron soup-kettle. One could almost believe that Morgan had been sitting there ever since 49 B.C., or any other date, and always would be there. 'Another case,' he said abruptly. 'Guy I knew. He was a lawyer ——'

'Hold on a minute!' Morgan was always dragging these illustrations up out of that mysterious past of his. He seemed, for one of his apparent detachment, to have been familiar in a most intimate way with an extraordinary number of people. 'Did you really know this lawyer?' I demanded, 'or is it just somebody you've heard of?' 'Oh, I knew him,' said Morgan. 'Ran into him once. Forget his name. Anyhow, he fell for this girl ——'

And at that moment somebody knocked abruptly on the door.

It startled me. No one ever came there. And at that hour. It had the sound of an ominous visitation. 'Come in,' growled Morgan. 'Constellation Publicity,' seen backward, swung slowly upon its hinges. I waited with a faint perturbation. . . .

It was not a very terrifying apparition. A slightly diffident, neat-visaged young man, of about twenty-five. But he caught sight of me and stared; I returned the stare, and to my extreme surprise it dawned upon me that I knew him.

'Hello,' he said. 'Where the devil did you come from?'

I made a desperate effort to recall who he was. 'Didn't know you two knew each other,' said the boy, strolling into the room. And then I had him. His name was Sigourney — Jasper Sigourney, and the last time I had seen him he was still a university undergraduate. If he had been a genie I could scarcely have been more astonished. It was exactly as if Morgan had materialized him for my benefit out of the dimmer recesses of my memory, and might rub him out again at the next moment with an equal unexpectedness.

'How small the world is,' said Morgan. 'Have a drink?'

Jasper Sigourney had the drink. He did not vanish. Instead he slumped into the remaining cane-bottomed chair, put his feet at length upon the window sill, and tilted back, with his chin sunk reflectively upon his necktie.

'Well,' he said indifferently, 'how's the misogynist?'

'How's Sir Galahad, the white-headed lady-killer?'

'Still galahading.'

'Go to it!' said Morgan, waving his glass in an ironic toast.

'Yes,' said the other, and stopped.

It began to come back to me. I had encountered him one year at a summer-resort hotel, before our entry into the war; and I remembered him for a likable fellow, with considerable earnestness in him and some keenness. We had gone on tramps together. I recalled his obvious, theoretical youthfulness, his enthusiasm, and his taste for complexly philosophical

discussion. I had endless arguments with him, on the kind of subject that one does have endless argument about. The reality of God. Or the position of the Democratic Party as the vessel of Liberalism. Or science's contribution to contemporary ethics. He was perhaps the last person in the world I should have expected to rediscover in Morgan's cell at midnight. The war had swallowed him up in the fall of 1917. And now he simply appeared out of nowhere as another of Morgan's ambiguous acquaintance. 'Where've you been keeping yourself?' I demanded, with the fatuousness usual to such remarks.

'In the South,' he said. 'Been there for the last four years, in one place or another — Savannah, mostly. Savannah, Georgia, you know. It's the darndest town I ever saw — all rather like the last century or something. I don't know just what I mean, only it hasn't. . . . Lord, I am glad rather to get back to New York again. How's everything?'

We talked idly, across that rather uncertain gap of years. As a matter of fact, I don't know why I should have been so surprised. In New York you are always running into people whom you haven't seen for longer than you care to remember. You ask them how they are and what they have been doing; but what you really want to know, as you look at them doubtfully, is not what they have been doing but what the time has done to them. I had the impression that it had done something to Sigourney. I missed the bright, youthful insistence of those arguments. 'But you know,' I could remember his saying, 'you don't seem to be maintaining the consistency of your position. Granted this, it *must* follow ——' One had

always felt like laying hold of him by the intellectual coat-tails and saying: 'Slow down a bit. Take it easy. Of course it must follow, only it generally doesn't, you know.'

Well, something of the snap seemed to have gone out of him. It may have been that he was tired. But it was more as if he were perplexed, or thinking of something else. It occurred to me that he might have private business with Morgan, but when I began to make remarks about going home he said that he would walk along with me when I was ready. So Morgan asked us if we would have a drink, and I failed to go.

I couldn't imagine what he had to do with Morgan. It seemed that he had gone South after the war, and had been there ever since, in pursuit of fortune. He was coming back now, he said, 'to look around for something else.' He said it with his eyes fixed vacantly on the black windowpanes, as if he rather imagined that a job might come up outside and knock upon them, but as if at any rate he intended to wait there until it did. 'The South's not much good,' he said. 'Of course, they're doing pretty big things down there and I can give you all the Rotary Club line about the New South and natural resources and the Wonder State. . . . But I don't know. There doesn't seem to be much *point* to it; not for me, anyhow. It doesn't really seem to get you anywhere, even if you are the biggest better business man in the Savannah Board of Trade. I suppose a fellow ought to stick to New York ——'

I said that I supposed so.

'Don't stick to anything,' said Morgan suddenly. 'Except your self-respect. If you can.'

The other looked at him, and looked away. 'I say, Morgan, have you stuck to yours?'

'I specialize in it,' said Morgan. 'Just look at me.'

'He's got a Theory,' said the boy to me, without turning his head. He capitalized the word in pronouncing it. 'But I suppose you know all about that.'

I confessed that I did not.

Morgan laughed. 'It's short and sweet: Don't let it get you!'

'Is that the theory?'

'It is. Don't let it get you. Anything. Wine, women, or song. Maybe you've noticed that I always drink whiskey and never sing. Neither do I sell bonds or write novels or go to the polls or save civilization. I don't make love and I don't make money. Result: I'm one of the few who don't make fools of themselves.'

'Freedom!' said the boy, in a sudden explanatory ejaculation. 'I say, Morgan, what an unmitigated idiot you are. As if you could set your soul, or whatever damned thing it is you've got, at liberty by shutting yourself up in this confounded hole. . . .'

'Don't get metaphysical, sonny,' said Morgan. 'Especially when you don't know what you're talking about. Take ten years off and have a look at yourself. You can go chase yourself afterward if you want to; but you won't want to — you'll find out by that time that it isn't worth while chasing anything. My theory is founded on the simple principle of keeping my eyes skinned. If you do that, you'll appreciate the facts, which are that you can't win, no way. You needn't try, because you can't.'

'Rot!' said the boy. 'The first time I heard that I broke the slats out of my cradle.'

'And the first time I ever heard *that*,' said Morgan, 'I bashed in my nurse's face with the milk-bottle. . . . Anybody can tell you that you can't win. If you want to, I can tell you why.'

The boy jumped suddenly out of his chair — so suddenly that it startled me — and began a turn or two back and forth in the room. 'Rot!' he said again. I might have echoed the opinion; but oddly enough Morgan seemed actually to mean what he was saying. It was impossible at any rate to deny that he lived by that philosophy. The boy stopped, his hands thrust viciously into his pockets, and appeared on the point of speaking. It was exactly as if some obscure struggle were in progress between them. The raw light left Morgan's deep-set eyes in heavy shadows; it was as if he were using them in some hidden way to break down some gallant defense set up by the younger man. The boy stared at him; and said nothing.

'Then tell us why,' I demanded.

Outside the street had fallen unusually silent; the silence in the room was absolute. All at once the clock in the Metropolitan Tower commenced to strike the four quarters — a long chain of distant notes dropped down lightly into the room, a pause, and a single profound stroke. One.

'Because,' said Morgan, 'we're all too good for this planet. We fight too much like gentlemen. You go around expecting a square deal from life in general and it loads the dice on you. It doesn't know what a square deal means. The meanest, white-livered little human scoundrel that ever came down the pike is a

regular saint, I tell you, compared to — to what we're up against.'

'What awful nonsense,' said the boy, and sat down again.

'All right, sonny,' said Morgan. 'Just don't let it get you, that's all. Have a drink?'

Perhaps that process had already been repeated as many times as was desirable. The boy seemed to want to talk, and they wandered off into an abstract but somehow almost ferocious discussion, Sigourney insisting upon the absurdity of Morgan's cynicism, and the older man beating him down at each turn. I remember something delivered very earnestly by the boy about 'the moral cowardice of the mediæval religious orders — hermits, you know, and all that sort of thing,' and then its all coming to an abrupt conclusion. The boy suddenly threw in his cards. 'I wish a guy could really know something about all that sort of stuff,' he said, almost plaintively. 'Not just talk foolishness about it.'

It was a sufficiently extraordinary conversation. The words were plain enough, but it seemed to be over my head, about something else. So I asked him more about Savannah. It appeared that he had gone down there as the employee of a large construction firm, and had worked as one of their engineers, in Savannah, and also on some cotton-mills they were putting up in the North Georgia mountains. And then he had returned to the coast to assist in the erection of a big sugar-refinery.

'We finished that job a couple of months ago,' he said. 'I had thought of staying on down there. Of course there's plenty of opportunity and all that. I don't know. Perhaps it's not my territory. Anyhow,

I thought I'd come back and see if the firm couldn't do something for me a little nearer Broadway and Forty-Second Street.'

But there was the hint of a vague irresolution in all this. He was uncomfortable. 'So,' said Morgan, 'you're going to abandon the backwoods, marry an heiress and set up for the rest of your life on Long Island, eh?'

'No, I'm not going to do that.'

'Well, the heiress will probably marry you, then, so you needn't worry.'

'No,' said the boy gravely. 'I needn't worry. You needn't worry either. You see — well, in Savannah, I did get married ——' there was a perceptible pause, the boy's face turned studiously upon the floor-boards — 'somehow.'

You will admit that it was a striking addition.

'I'll be damned,' said Morgan.

'I don't see why,' said the boy.

'No reason at all, of course. Just the normal course of nature, eh? Are you going to bring your wife to call on me?'

'No,' said the boy. 'Not now, anyway. She's still in Savannah. I didn't — that is, she didn't come up with me.'

'Well, well now,' said Morgan.

'Well,' said the boy, getting up again, 'I think it's time to go. Coming?'

We went, and shut Morgan away behind us in his cell, gazing at the wall. We strolled on toward Fifth Avenue, where our routes parted. The conversation had a remarkably desultory character. 'I say,' he jerked out suddenly and quite irrelevantly, in the middle of Madison Square, 'a guy ought to be able

to make a good thing out of it in this town if anywhere, don't you think?' I said yes; but I did not know what he might mean by a 'good thing.'

On the Avenue there were no taxis, and he started walking off alone up that immense street. The long strings of electric light globes marched away in converging lines up Murray Hill; the great shadowy buildings, vastly silent, looked down upon his single figure; and he strode forward, surrounded by the huge and complex forces of the city to whose unpredictable consequences he had chosen once more to subject himself.

I turned away with a sense of irritation. I had not even asked him how he had come to know Morgan.

V

Jasper Sigourney, as a matter of fact, was in difficulties. He was married. And he had got married 'somehow,' in a manner that was inexplicable to him. But there was nothing flippant in his use of that word; his perplexity, as I ultimately came to know, was of a serious and perhaps rather a subtle kind. It was at once peculiar and disturbing. He was married; and he did not know what had happened to him.

There could have been nothing very unusual about the marriage; the unusual quality appeared to be in the boy himself. It seems that it was his unhappy vice always to want to know too much. He had the habit of demanding explanations—it was the basis of that intellectual eagerness which had made him stick in the back part of my mind, and it was, for one who must live in a world where there aren't any explanations, most unfortunate. His was one of those restlessly troubled intelligences which can never reconcile themselves to the existence of the incomprehensible. He was perpetually attempting to understand the things which can never be understood by anybody, and it made him a prey to the most obscure of doubts at all the most inappropriate of moments. Even in the very midst of his wedding, as he subsequently confessed to me, he had been assailed by a momentary, objective uncertainty. 'It all seemed so sort of queer, you know,' was the way he put it.

'They had the place all banked up with orange blossoms,' he said, 'and there was all that crowd of people feeling solemn and the clergyman was asking

us those questions. I was feeling awfully solemn myself, of course. But you know how a fellow will go on thinking, underneath, in a case like that. And all at once, actually, I found myself wondering how on earth *I'd* got there. . . .'

He had stolen a glance at the demure face beside him, unfamiliarly framed in yellowed lace, and it had abruptly seemed to him the face, not of a stranger, but of an enigma. It was simply the way the man's mind worked. They were being married in the high-ceilinged, old-fashioned room of an old-fashioned Savannah house. As he glanced at her, the soft sunlight, diffused through the tall jalousies, the curtains, and the close foliage of the floral arrangements, lay with a charming delicacy upon the girl's cheek. A transcendent shading upon the soft turn of the flesh, enough to send a shiver of mystery through the faded relatives and friends who were crowding the background. But for an instant, he said, it had for him only the mystery of a complex chemical composition. 'And that's mysterious enough,' he added. 'But what did it have to do with me? What was it thinking about? What did it *mean?*'

And when a man begins to ask what things mean, he is of course impossible. 'I wondered what, really, it was all about, and why I should be standing up there making responses. . . . Oh, of course, it only lasted for a split second. There was the ring business to attend to.' And the next thing he knew the ceremony was over. His wife — it was an amazing fact — slipped her arm warmly and happily through his own. Music. Kissing the bride, who responded with a radiant smile in which there was no suggestion of a chemical composition whatever. And a tide of com-

plicated emotions in himself, in which there was even less. People crowding about. His wife's mother, Mrs. Howard, on the verge of a slight tremulousness, and dispersing the scent of lavender. Shelby Howard, tall, business-like, with his slightly humorous dignity, dispersing very faintly the scent of the mint julep with which he had fortified himself against the bestowal of his only daughter. Congratulations, jokes, everything precisely as he had imagined it would be. 'I was awfully happy,' said Jasper simply, 'and proud of her.' It had only lasted for a split second.

And yet that absurd mystery persisted with him. He could not explain what had happened.

What had happened primarily was that Shelby Howard had asked him to dinner. It was very shortly after his first arrival in Savannah, in the cool, almost subterranean bar of the club. Jasper Sigourney was fresh from the army, with the business, not so much of making his living, but of making his life before him; he was remarkably young, and alert to the fascinating charm of the semi-tropics and of the Old South. The palm trees, the solidly built old houses, the placid squares, where gentlemen clad in white strolled through the glaring heats, infected him with their factitious romance. Jasper, who was a native of the Middle West, had never experienced anything quite like it before, and it impressed him. He was impressed by the tranquillity of the streets and the sense of tradition which he discovered in such places as the club. 'It was,' he said, 'the sort of thing you read about in books.' For Savannah, undeniably, possesses an atmosphere.

Shelby Howard was a product of the New South,

but he too appeared to possess an atmosphere. He was a lawyer, and he strove to look like a successful one; but he strove also to maintain a certain old-fashioned courtliness of manner, and his friends called him 'Sir Shelby.' He had shrewd eyes and a dignified affability; while the facts that he wore yellow pongee clothes in the summer, and that the Howards had first come to Savannah in 1751 were some of the things with which Sigourney was impressed.

I don't suppose that Sir Shelby's law practice was a very profitable one. He believed importantly in the future of the South, but there were indications that he found the present to have its difficulties. Standing in the bar of the club — a spot in which he had passed perhaps too much of a pleasant but not wholly successful life — he must have reflected that he was getting on. Jasper was confessing his enthusiasm for the charms of the city, and manifesting an interest in its history. Sir Shelby, in his legal way, had latterly made rather a hobby of minor historical research. Probably it was because he had been born to the New South that he was so much interested in the old one. He seemed to get a whimsical amusement out of answering the younger man's queries. 'You must come to see me sometime,' he said. 'I have some books and records you might like to look over.'

Jasper assented, because Savannah, Sir Shelby, and the pongees really did have a fascination for him. They awakened, I suppose, his inappeasable metaphysical curiosity. Sir Shelby regarded him through his shrewd eyes as if Jasper, on his side, might have possessed a fascination. Jasper was a young man, eager, with an engaging attractiveness in his rather intent face. Sir Shelby had heard him described by

his superiors as a highly promising youngster who would undoubtedly get on. He was apt to create that impression. And Sir Shelby reflected that there were many things in his own life which he had omitted to attend to. 'You must take dinner with us,' he said. 'I should like to introduce you to Mrs. Howard, and my daughter.'

Jasper was unaware that he had a daughter. That was not the reason why the invitation pleased him; rather, it was the graceful courtesy in which it had been issued, the background of long-established family tradition, the suggestion of a still fragrant and romantic past which hovered about the figure of the head of a family which had come over in 1751. The club bar was suffused with a gentle light from the little walled garden just beyond, where the tables were set out for dinner. The electric fans purred steadily, white-coated negroes moved with a discreet step, the semi-tropic garden seemed to revive as evening lifted from it the dead heat of the day. After the elder man was gone Sigourney intended to take a table out there, and sit over his coffee in a deepening picturesqueness as the twilight faded and an occasional fire-fly wandered in under the Japanese lanterns. . . .

So Sir Shelby had invited him to dinner. He lived, it appeared, in a tall, rectangular brick house, painted a solemn brown, with neat Georgian pediments over its doors and windows, and looking down into its own spot of garden, railed away from the street by an iron fence and a hedge of clematis. Polished brass handrails sprang lightly up its tall steps to a fine Georgian doorway, and its high, narrow façade wore the dignity of an impressive age. A negro butler received him. 'Yaassir. Please to sit down, sir;' and

plunged him at once into a deep pool of profound romance. The light was very dim indeed — Sir Shelby would probably have lit his house by candle had it not been so expensive — and it gave to that high, cool interior, filled with the shapes of old furniture, old bric-à-brac, heavy gold picture-framing, heavy brocade curtains in summer bags, an air of placid mystery. He sank into a chair, feeling as though nothing had happened in that room for a long, long time, except the steady, slow ticking of a clock somewhere in the shadows, and as if nothing would happen in it for a long time to come. All the objects were indistinct. On one side of the room there were two French windows — open, but with the curtains drawn nearly together — and between them there was an immensely tall pier-glass, reflecting the door and a fragment of the hallway with a dim magic. At one place against the wall Sigourney made out the curved shape of an old-fashioned cavalry saber; elsewhere, vague faces looked down upon him from the glint of their gold frames. There was a little trail of light across the dark, polished boards of the uncarpeted floor, and a spot of light in the curve of a great blue china jar sitting on a console below the mirror. His eyes returned again to the mirror itself, and he found that from its depths a slim girl, clad in white, was looking back at him.

Elizabeth Howard was undeniably a pretty girl, with an unobtrusive charm concealed in her quiet brown eyes and small features. Standing in the brighter light of the hallway, the mirror framed her with the suggestion of a portrait — a shy and almost old-fashioned painting. Even when he had sprung up and was facing her, the illusion was not wholly dis-

pelled; she suited that tableau so well that she might have arranged it. Perhaps she did. It was never easy to feel quite sure of what Elizabeth Howard was or was not capable of doing. Not, I think, that hers was a complicated character; it may only have been that it was so simple a one. I don't know. Sigourney, at any rate, did not know; but then, Jasper did not know very much about women.

She introduced herself in the musically softened drawl of the cultivated South, and began a little shyly to make conversation until her father and mother should come down. It must be admitted that the conversation was a trifle obvious. How did he like Savannah? Did he find it too hot? She had heard about him from her father. . . . Mrs. Howard and Sir Shelby entered. Mrs. Howard was in a state of hospitable agitation. Didn't he like Savannah? How did he find the weather? But this was a hot spell. They had heard so much about him. . . . Even so, the effect of that mirrored image persisted. Yes, Sir Shelby was saying, he must like Savannah. He must meet some people. And so on.

And so in to dinner, with its solemn chairs, its heavily ancestral silverware, its ministrations from the white-coated butler, whose name was Julius and who appeared to be nursing in secret all the sorrows of his race. Sir Shelby told anecdotes of a slightly legal flavor, laced with the light tinkle of ice in the embossed silver bowl which he resorted to in replenishing Jasper's glass. Mrs. Howard asked him about his boarding-house, as if she were interested in it. The girl sat across the table from him, and listened to them all impartially. It was just the family, as Sir Shelby had explained that it would be.

Afterwards, they went into the veranda which ran all down the side of the house, and sat there in the warm gloom, while the men's cigars rose and fell in little round glows. Sigourney discovered himself at one end of a swing hammock arrangement. He discovered that the girl was at the other. They became involved — he could not imagine how — in a discussion of the relative beauty of Northern girls and Southern girls. . . .

Of course, he went there quite often after that. The Howards got him invitations to the various summer dances, picnics and so on, and Elizabeth asked him to her bridge-parties. The dances and the bridge, as a matter of fact, rather bored him, because he found it so difficult to talk to the débutantes; but the house continued to exercise for him its strong attraction. It was, he said, like a novel, 'a kind of literature of escape.' Not that Jasper had anything in particular to escape from, except the dissatisfactions of his youth and of his absurd logical insistence upon penetrating all the mysteries. But perhaps that is enough for any one to want to escape from. It amused him to be taken into Sir Shelby's little library at the back of the house, and to be shown such relics as a pair of silver-mounted dueling pistols, or the complete bound set of *The Southern Literary Messenger*, which was kept locked up there in a latticed bookcase. It appeared to amuse Sir Shelby, too. His own two sons had turned out rather badly, it seemed, and had no interest either in Poe or in past history. While Jasper, on his part, had never before encountered a family which had come over in 1751, and did not even know when his own family had come over, though he assumed that it must have done so. He liked to

frequent that house, because it was so strange to him.

But the part that Elizabeth Howard had in all this was not very clear. Jasper found that he was generally her escort to the dances, because, as it finally dawned upon him, there seldom appeared to be any one else to escort her. I suppose the truth was that Elizabeth had never been a popular girl, for some one of those inexplicable reasons which occasionally wreck the careers of apparently the most charming débutantes. But Jasper continued to take her to the parties. It was, he said to himself, only common decency, after all they had done for him.

It is true that Jasper himself did not fit very easily into the compact social structure of a small city. There was, for example, the occasion upon which he abruptly squared his head back in the middle of a fox trot, interrupted an unsuspecting partner as she was humming the tune to herself, and demanded: 'But what do you get out of all this, anyway?'

The partner responded by smiling automatically and saying: 'What?'

'I mean,' said Jasper, 'you spend your time going around to dances and bridge and that sort of thing, and then at the dances you spend your time going round and round a floor. Silly, isn't it, when you come to think of it? All these supposedly intelligent people just sliding round in circles. . . .'

'No,' said the girl. 'Is it? Why?'

'I mean — gosh,' said Jasper. 'I don't know exactly how to say it. But it seems funny to me. . . .'

'Yes,' she said dubiously. 'Isn't it?' And then she added brightly: 'Now you're being philosophical,

I just love to hear men talk when they're philosophical. It's so deep.'

'It isn't philosophy,' said Jasper, with a slight irritation. But the girl was wondering whether the man on the end of the 'stag-line' would cut in on her. The man did so.

But Jasper was really interested in his speculations. Among the unattached men he drifted into a young ex-aviator, a man with deep-set and burning eyes, in which it seemed possible to read the long agony of suffering and courage through which he must have passed. 'I've got a flask,' said the aviator. 'Let's have one.' They did have one. Jasper, looking into those fiery eyes, was about to pose again his ridiculous question. 'It's duller'n mud in this hole,' said the man of sorrows. 'There's a nigger cock-fight on down by the river. Let's beat it over there.'

'Can't,' said Jasper. 'I've got to see Elizabeth Howard home.'

'Oh, all right,' said the other, 'you can get back in time to put your baby to bed.'

'She isn't my baby ——' Jasper began with some asperity. But the aviator was taking another drink.

Sometimes when he had taken her home, Elizabeth would ask him to come in for some ginger ale or a piece of cake. Then they would make their way into the silently cavernous dining-room; Elizabeth would set out the plates and glasses upon the dark mahogany of the dining-table, and then lean her really lovely elbows upon it, her small chin sunk upon the clasped hands. And Elizabeth would smile at him.

'Did you enjoy yourself?'

'Not as much as I'm enjoying myself right now,' Jasper would say, and it would be a simple statement

of fact. He found that he liked the quiet of the big room, with her watchfully intimate gaze, especially after the noise and bother and stupid small talk of one of those dances. And his answer would apparently please her.

She commented, idly, upon the evening. 'That Chester girl was there. She's an awful little thing. She's trying to get Tommy Schofield, because he's well-off. Tommy's a nice boy; you'd think he'd have more *sense*.'

'But where do you get ideas like that, anyhow?' he protested. 'How do you know she's trying to get Tommy Schofield?'

'Why,' said Elizabeth, '*any* one could see it. Didn't you notice? She got Charley to take her up to the punch-bowl just because Tommy and Sarah Smith were over there by themselves. She's always tagging after some man that way. I'd be ashamed.'

'No, I didn't notice,' said the boy. 'I say, Elizabeth, you're pretty keen, aren't you?'

She tossed her head. 'You don't have to be keen to see things like that. Why, I'd be ashamed the way that girl does. She does it on purpose, too; she used to be awful nice and quiet, but then she just decided that she'd never get anybody that fashion. Now she goes around running after people and acting fast. She was tight at the barbecue last week. It was terrible.'

'Maybe you're right,' said Jasper, remembering that women were mysterious and remarkable creatures. He raised his eyes to hers across the table. 'You seem to see a lot of things going on that I miss all the time.'

'Well, you haven't lived here like I have,' she said.

'No,' said the boy, 'but in some way you seem to

know about things that I guess I just don't know about at all.'

'Yes? . . .'

He was constantly being surprised by what he supposed were her 'feminine intuitions.' Jasper, who was interested in ideas, seldom had intuitions, which must have made them seem very wonderful to him.

It got so that they were always being seen about together. Sir Shelby even took the trouble to ask Jasper's chief about his backgrounds and his prospects in life. The chief said that he came of a good, or at least an apparently prosperous family, and that he was a hard worker. Sir Shelby's own sons had not been hard workers. One was rather vaguely understood to be prospecting for oil in Texas; the other held a sufficiently unprofitable post as a civil servant in Washington. Sir Shelby permitted himself a sentimental sigh, and reflected again that there really were a great many things which he had omitted to attend to. And an almost parental note began to insinuate itself into his faintly courtly attitude toward Jasper. Jasper didn't notice this because he never did notice things of that sort; and it never even entered his head that there was any connection between Elizabeth and himself, other than that he liked to visit the romantic household in which she lived.

Because Jasper Sigourney was a civil engineer, it was natural, I suppose, that he should have been an incurable romantic. There can be no more muddle-headed a mysticism than that which correlates, say, the annual increase in horse-power produced to human progress, and it is of course your logician rather than your dancing man who allows himself to

be deceived by the glowingly woven colors of experience. To Sigourney those colors seemed shot with a rare and arresting brilliance. His work was conducted against a vivid background of blue sky, green marsh and the turgid brick red of the river, hot with the fecund heat of the coast country. Clumps of Spanish bayonet impeded the clearing of the ground, and they raised the steel framing of their buildings against the somber background of live-oak trees hung with long gray festoons of Spanish moss. The sunglare fell down into their clearing almost as if it were something solid; and occasionally there rose through it a long-drawn, whining song, as natural and as primitive as the sunlight itself, as the negro laborers carried on the work. And there was a natural romance in these laborers, in their rags of clothing, their fine bodies, their perfectly running muscles, and in the dramatic annals of their lives, with which he was sometimes forced to deal.

'Yaas, I 'spec you better git a doctor, Mis' Sig'ney. Gone plumb through his right laig, it did. Yaas, Jim shot 'im on sight, 'cause he was goin' round with Jim's Sadie. No, Sadie aint Jim's wife, 'xactly, 'cause she got married to a feller in Charleston when she was drunk, but she's Jim's woman. No, he won't bleed to death, not 'im. But I reckon you better git a doctor look at 'im.'

And so on. The simplicity and directness of those contretemps awoke an odd response in Sigourney. . . .

Or in the cool of the evening, in white linens, strolling along under the palmettoes in Bull Street, through the dimming squares laid out so neatly and so long ago by General Oglethorpe, past the old houses, amid the fragrance of honeysuckle or clematis or bougain-

villeas or even the sickly oleander blossoms. Romance; and a sense of things missed or things not understood. Or in the early mornings, with the first heat of the day lacing the sidewalk along under the arching trees, and a young negro woman, with a basket on her head, calling: 'Shreemp! Fresh shreemp!' Lithe of movement and erect of carriage. Only a negro woman. Only a woman. A woman, that is to say. . . . What is a woman, different from a man? He ought to read up about that. Weren't there books, by these Freudian psychology fellows, which told you all about it?

He did not read the books. Instead he talked to Elizabeth, because, I suppose, there was no one else in particular to talk to. It was one evening that they found themselves, the two of them, in the straggling little garden before the high façade of the Howard house. After dinner; with a lingering of twilight in the soft, heavy darkness, and with the street lamp at the corner beginning to throw odd shadows among the tangled rosebushes and across the tiny graveled walk, with its saw-toothed border of old bricks set up on edge. 'I like it here,' he announced, 'it's such a queer, old-fashioned city, with a quality in it. Sort of magical.'

'Yes,' she said. 'Yes. I suppose so.'

'You know it,' he insisted. 'Why, if your grandfather should walk down the steps this minute in his gray uniform with that cavalry saber, I swear, I don't think I'd be surprised.'

'Yes,' said Elizabeth. 'There's such a lot of history here. Yes, I love that part.'

'But I don't know,' he said, 'why wars should always get to look attractive just because they're past.

When I came back from France I wasn't looking for any place that had ever had anything to do with war. . . . But that's another thing. Things seem to last here, traditions, I mean, and ideas. In Paris after the Armistice it all seemed such a ghastly mess. . . .'

She turned her pretty, rather demure face upon him. 'Lots of the boys seemed to think things like that when they came back,' she said. 'There was Jack Slaton. He used to scare me. And then he ran away with Lucille Hawes two weeks after he came home, but he nearly broke her heart because afterwards he said he was crazy when he did it, only he wasn't, you know, not a bit. But maybe he had shell-shock.'

'Oh, of course yes, there's that sort of thing. But it wasn't what I meant exactly. I meant, the world seems to get its head all full of wild ideas about everything, and you get tangled up until you don't know where you are and then you come to a place like this. . . . I should think you ought to be happy living here.'

'I suppose so. I don't want to live here always. . . . Aren't you happy?'

'Why, surely. I'm not complaining,' said Jasper. 'Of course a fellow has his dissatisfactions — about his work, and getting on, and his ideas — and about women, too.'

She looked at him rather suddenly.

'Oh, I don't mean any woman in particular,' he said, dismissing it, 'only that it's a nuisance.' He paused, then. She was standing very close to him. She had to, as a matter of fact, because the garden walk did not allow of great distances. But abruptly Sigourney became intensely aware of her. 'Really,'

he said, as if he were making a discovery, 'you know, I like to be with you. Awfully. . . .'

It was a discovery. He had never realized the fact before. The girl really was standing very close to him, in the fragrant, warm dusk; dim and white, as she had seemed in the depths of that old mirror, with her dark hair outlining the white oval of her face. Her head was slightly back, lifted to meet his gaze. All at once she smiled at him — smiled at him, and laid her arm softly through his, and her hand upon his sleeve. That was all. But he regarded her with an abrupt astonishment. Something had happened. And perhaps that was a discovery, too.

It was too silly, he thought, to imagine that the girl was in love with him. So he avoided imagining such things. But all the same, he knew that she was. He went home in a state of tremendous excitement, to consider the situation on logical principles. This process ended at two in the morning, after he had proved conclusively that he had no intention of marrying anybody, and that it was too idiotic to drop a girl just because she had smiled once at him in a garden. But since these proofs appeared to prove nothing in particular, he said 'Damn' and went to bed.

Nevertheless, it was different after that. With an awakened attention, he perceived how much a matter of habit it had become with their acquaintances to throw them together. He perceived how much more freely she talked over these same acquaintances with him than with any one else. He understood that he was the recipient of family confidences. . . .

But oddly enough he didn't seem to mind it. He actually found himself going to the house more often

than before. One afternoon he took her over the works, and explained it all to her, while she listened with the most gratifying attention. I suppose she liked the look of his flannel shirt open at the neck. 'You see,' he said, 'these I-beams will carry the machinery, so——' 'Yes,' she said, 'it's awfully interesting.'

And then they went on boating expeditions down the river, in the glowing sunshine between the hot, green banks, where the rice-birds went away in sudden flurries and tall white herons regarded them morosely from one leg. I suppose the herons were used to that sort of thing. Down on one heavy red tide and back on the next, with a picnic supper and Sigourney smoking to keep off the mosquitoes. And long idle conversations in which Sigourney, I imagine, talked about his work and his ideas, and the girl talked about her friends. That seemed to have a fascination and even a mystery for him. She was ordinarily so silent and contained a little thing; but when they were together she would run on with the most flattering unconcern, recklessly imputing motives to what Sigourney had thought to be the most insignificant of actions. There was a note of acidity in Elizabeth. But, because he rarely observed such things himself, he thought that she had a remarkable insight.

So the boat would float down in the coils of the river, and Jasper, lying back, with the actual Elizabeth Howard away from him in the stern-sheets, would construct his ideal view of her. Should he, or should he not? Perhaps he would like to be married. It would give him a starting point for his rather purposeless existence. He was very rational about it.

But even philosophers cannot be rational always. It happened on one of these trips that they went ashore at the old abandoned brick fortification at the turn of the river. They slipped in through the heavily mossed water-gate; and in the silence of the marsh and the cypress trees and the rotting brickwork they were again very much alone, very intimate. He steadied the boat against the wall for her to land. It was a good deal of a step. She stood up, and then she paused, looked at the landing-place in a certain hesitation, and looked back at Jasper. He didn't appreciate the difficulty until she gave a self-conscious little laugh, gathered up her overtight skirt, and scrambled out. He was staring directly at her, naturally, fearing that she might slip; there was a flurry of underclothes, the plain flash of a white knee and thigh, and then she was standing upon the wall, smoothing down her dress. 'Oh my,' she said, and demurely caught her under lip between her teeth, 'I suppose I oughtn't to have done that.' The affair was so trivial that even such an inexperienced child as Jasper would have dismissed it had she not made precisely that kind of point out of it. He jumped up beside her. 'But,' she said, smiling at him, 'with us it doesn't really matter, does it?' and she caught his arm closely within her own warm one. He felt the light pressure of her body against his own, and a tide of erotic excitement swept through him.

He was such a child. They clambered up the rampart together and sat down, with the red flood pouring along below them and the marsh away across on the opposite bank shimmering in the afternoon heat. He said that with them, of course, it didn't matter, and she leaned her shoulder against his own.

It had the same effect upon him as if she had given herself to him. Children can be infinitely absurd. But she had trusted to him. Why, the whole town must think that they were already engaged. He put his arm around her, finding something unspeakably pleasant in that very ordinary action. Well, he couldn't back out now. They said nothing. . . .

Jasper Sigourney could have supplied many reasons to explain why, not so very long after that, he proposed to Elizabeth Howard. But Jasper could rationalize anything. They were excellent reasons. He even endeavored to expound them to Sir Shelby, in the library. The shrewd eyes were inclined toward him in a business-like but benignant manner. Sir Shelby made a slight gesture — a lawyer, putting aside irrelevant evidence. 'My boy,' he said, 'that's all right. Don't say another word. But make her happy.'

'Yes, sir,' said Jasper, with a profound solemnity.

The elder man arose, stepped across to the cellaret, and brought out a squat-shaped bottle. 'This is some pretty rare stuff,' he said, filling two thimblefuls. 'Eighty-year-old cognac, that came to this country in a blockade-runner, during the war. It occurs to me that this is an appropriate occasion. . . .' It was unnecessary for Jasper to explain his reasons to Sir Shelby. I think it probable that he knew them better than Jasper. After all, it was Sir Shelby who had invited him to dinner.

VI

In New York Jasper went to stay with Nina Bradstreet. This was because she was some sort of distant cousin of his, and because it had suddenly occurred to her that it would be amusing to have some one in whom she could take a motherly interest. Nina was a compact and alert little lady who was, at any rate, old enough to be his mother; it was many years since she actually had been one, and this mood of obscurely somber tragedy in which Jasper returned from the South aroused her curiosity, I suppose, as well as her sympathy. She made him talk to her. . . .

'But to tell you the truth,' she said, in her nicely, almost primly modulated voice, 'I still fail rather to *see* this lady of yours.'

Jasper must have glowered back at her with a really impressive moroseness. He gave her, anyway, what she described as a 'dirty look,' and Nina seldom descended into slang unless either her emotions or her amusement were deeply stirred. He planted himself in front of her chair, and took a firm grip upon the bunch of keys which he always carried in one pocket and the loose change which he always carried in the other. 'Well, what do you suppose I'm talking to you for?' he demanded.

'My dear boy, I always assume that men talk to me because of my natural charm. It seems more polite to them. . . .'

'That's all right, Nina,' he said, as if he had a personal grievance against her. 'But you know perfectly

well I'm not going into all this — all this past history on account of your natural charm.'

'Then I wish you would tell me what you are going into it for?' said Nina, who rarely became entirely interested in any man until he was a little rude to her.

'Because it's your business to see things like that. What do you expect me to know about women?'

'Have another cup of tea,' said Mrs. Bradstreet suddenly. 'I forget — two lumps or one?'

'Two.' And he subsided into a chair. As a matter of fact, Sigourney didn't know precisely what he was going into all that past history for. It was not his way to make confidences. But I suppose he had allowed that marriage of his to worry him to a dead end. He had given it up. 'Two,' he said gloomily, in a sudden conviction of the deviousness of the feminine mind. She knew perfectly well how many lumps he took; if what she wanted was a minor pause for consideration why couldn't she say so, outright? But they never did. It was always such an infernal mess with women. . . .

Mrs. Bradstreet poured the tea with her bright, almost beady little eyes and her bright, neat face turned upon her young relative. He could have found, at any rate, a worse confidante. Confronted, like most prosperous women in later life, by the necessity of getting through the remainder without benefit of occupation, she had answered the problem with a combination of Womrath's circulating library and a slightly sarcastic interest in other people's affairs. Her husband was absorbed in golf and his furniture factory, and her children were married and moved away. She had a son in California and a daughter in Buenos Aires; this, she said, was a relief, and she re-

quired younger people to call her by her first name. But that was largely a pretense. She insisted upon her youthfulness mainly to conceal her secret and immoral pleasure in the indolence, the calm and the wider horizons of advancing age.

'What,' he said abruptly, 'do you keep that confounded thingamajig on your mantelpiece for?'

The thingamajig was a china clock in violently bad taste under bell glass, which had irritated his already exacerbated mood by suddenly striking four with its hands pointing to five o'clock.

'Because, my dear, I need something to remind me of how old I am. It was a wedding present. A wedding present! Can you imagine it?'

'Yes,' he said, and fell back into his abstraction, 'they do make 'em rather differently nowadays. We got three.'

'I don't mind your being rude to me,' said Nina. 'I don't mind your manners, because they're impossible anyway. But it won't help you any. It won't make me any more of a mind-reader, which seems to be what you expect.... What's she *like*, Jasper?'

He sighed and floundered off into description, or what he thought was description. There was even something about 'brown eyes, and brown hair, laid down flat ——'

Mrs. Bradstreet raised the palm of one neat hand from her lap, and stopped him with a little laugh. He got up and wandered away toward the baby grand piano. 'Wish you had a decent place to sit,' he said, with his back to her. Nina's room was a careful Louis XV, and he hated Louis XV chairs. Their elegant rigidity suited Nina, who always sat upright in

them, with an erect intentness about her. But the consequence was that, for other people, she did not have any decent place to sit in her room. This may have been to keep her husband out of it; but I don't know. She said that she liked her husband, and it may easily have been true.

Jasper faced about, the afternoon light falling from behind him through Nina's exquisite lace curtains. 'Confound it all,' he burst out, 'it's my fault, I know. But it's like some rotten sort of fatality. It ought to have been all right ——'

'But it isn't,' said Nina.

'But it just isn't. Why, there was a little thing, on the very first day, when that fool Billy Winslow was driving us down to the station after the wedding. . . . He was driving as if he wanted to break our necks, and she put her hand in mine. . . . There was a glove on it,' he said, with a seeming irrelevance.

Nina smiled.

'That's it! I want you to laugh at it. It's all laughable enough, I guess. . . . Winslow made a terrific slew around the end of a street-car and we missed a big cotton truck by about three inches. It scared me, and it made me feel responsible, you know. I mean, I'd taken charge of her. So I looked at her, and she smiled, but I swear I don't know what she was thinking about. And really, it was an awfully narrow squeak.'

'She was thinking about you, my dear.'

'No. That's what made me remember it afterward. I knew she wasn't. I said something to her ——'

'Jasper, what did you say?'

'What? Oh, I don't know — what anybody would have said. No matter what might happen now, I

told her, she would have me. She could always rely on me. This thing was going to go. Of course, you promise all that in the wedding ceremony, but the promises that way don't seem to mean much. I told her I'd *make* myself make it go.'

Nina looked at him with a considerable curiosity. 'Did you really, Jasper? Say that?' He nodded. 'What unmitigated egotists,' she said, 'you men are.'

'Egotists?' he repeated in astonishment.

'Tell me some more, Jasper. You have no idea how fascinating you are. . . . What did she say?'

'Nothing!' he exclaimed, as if the riddle of it exasperated him. 'She just didn't understand what I meant. Not the faintest idea. I'm not saying a thing against her, and I know that it was all my fault, somehow. But it got me. We were man and wife, you see, and she didn't know what I was talking about even.'

'And so all that beautiful devotion,' said Nina sadly, 'just went to waste.'

'It was all rather like that. If there'd been a baby — but there wasn't any baby. I don't know. . . .'

'And you want me to tell you what's happened?'

He crossed the room toward her, his angry mood suddenly just slumping down into that troubled perplexity of his. 'Yes,' he said. He fished a letter out of his side pocket and waved at her. 'Now here's this,' he said. To Nina, who was really fond of her cousin, it seemed that there was something queerly pathetic in his emotional helplessness. 'There's no sense to it, after what's happened. She knew why I was coming North. She knew it was because things had turned out badly. And then she writes me this: "Father is well and asks after you. He says you

might look up Mr. Joe Shearness, who is an old friend of his and might be able to help you if you are still looking for a new position. Mother says to give you her love and that she hopes you'll be back soon. It has been awfully hot ——" And so on. You might think I was on a Rotary Club excursion.'

'No,' said Nina, 'somehow I don't seem to see your wife very clearly, Jasper.'

'It doesn't mean anything. Or what does it mean? She can see how things have been as well as I can. Why during the three months we were on that cotton-mill job in North Georgia I don't believe we spoke half a dozen words a day to each other. It was only when Tommy Schofield was staying with us . . . I just didn't interest her, I guess. And I had thought ——'

'What had you thought?'

'Well, you know, when we were married,' he began diffidently, 'well — well, let's put it this way, that she seemed to be getting as much out of it as I was. . . .'

Nina Bradstreet leaned forward slightly. Nina often made quick movements, but never extended ones. There was a distinct fragility about her, as if she were a glass vessel that could be broken by too much violence. And a suggestion, too, that if the vessel ever should be broken it might spill vitriol over its surroundings. But there was nothing vitriolic in her question:

'Jasper, my dear,' she said, 'you weren't rescuing a distressed damsel, were you?'

'Rot!' he said.

She nodded. 'Of course. Rot.'

He plunged quickly ahead. 'It was obvious

enough. I told her when I left that I thought perhaps I shouldn't remain permanently in the South. I said it would give both of us time to think.'

'So you simply abandoned the poor little thing.'

'No!' he exclaimed very emphatically. 'Hadn't I promised?

'It wasn't that,' he said, and wandered off again to the other side of the room, turned, and wandered back. 'Maybe I don't know her very well. She always seems like something wonderful to me. Like an amazing piece of machinery. . . . '

'Poetic imagination you've got,' said Nina softly.

'Oh the devil! I was only trying to explain. . . . It's my fault, it must be my fault, because I'd promised that I'd make it go and it hasn't gone. But I didn't abandon her. It was she who abandoned me. She's just drifted away. . . . It's what I don't *understand*.'

'Nor do I — quite.'

He sat down abruptly. 'Well then ——?'

'Do you have to understand it?' asked Nina.

'We're all rational human beings, aren't we?'

'Oh, my dear, nobody's rational any longer. That went out — why, all of a year ago, I think.'

'Did you get that out of a novel?' he demanded. 'You're always reading some fool book or other. . . .'

'Have a cup of tea,' she remarked sweetly.

'It's cold.'

She poured it out for him. 'Let me see, do you take one or is it two?' . . .

The gathering dusk was imparting an air of illusion to Mrs. Bradstreet's Louis XV drawing-room. The light softened down until Nina's prim neatness began insensibly to shadow into a romantic harmony with her surroundings. She looked, behind her silver tea

service, like some very great lady indeed; and one could almost imagine the negro page-boy in scarlet and gold behind her chair. . . . Her interior decorator, at any rate, had known how to study the extreme nicety of her small person. Some of Nina's friends had begun to call her 'modern' and so Nina had said that it was much too stupid being modern, and that if anything she was eighteenth century. Afterward, the craze for the eighteenth century came in, and then Nina turned to jeer at 'the morbid passion for piracy and the works of Boswell.' But she did not change her room.

Illusion walked in it; and Jasper, who was entangled in so many illusions, found himself momentarily wondering whether perhaps it was not all a dream, and of no consequence. And then the faint but persistent strains of a radio loud-speaker, in the rhythmic agonies of a fox trot, made themselves heard in the room, and Nina suddenly wrinkled her fastidious nose.

'People upstairs,' she said. 'The name is Perkins. They act like it. And the ceilings are supposed to be sound-proof. It's outrageous.'

'Yes,' said Sigourney, absent-mindedly professional, 'these sound-deadening compositions aren't much good —— But see here, Nina, you've *got* to tell me something.'

'I? I could tell you a lot of things. This Tommy Schofield for instance ——'

'No, no,' he said impatiently, 'you're all wrong. It isn't that at all. And even if it were, Tommy Schofield doesn't care for her —— I mean, anything like that is just nonsense.'

'Oh, I see,' said Nina. 'But if I did tell you any-

thing, you wouldn't believe me. . . . Vile people, the Perkinses. She is interested in Wedgwood or Italian peasant pottery or something like that. I don't care for ceramics. She has a son. I don't care for her son. He works that wretched loud-speaker thing. . . . No, you wouldn't believe me, Jasper, and besides, you'll have to find out for yourself.'

'I suppose it's a failure,' he said, after a pause. 'A flat, damnable failure. Everything gone to pot. And I thought North Georgia would be wonderful. You know, pine woods, long talks, swimming, away from the world. My God! I'll say we were away from the world. She must've nearly died of it, except when Schofield livened things up a bit with some bridge. And we had to get in one of the foremen for that.'

Nina liked her cousin, and felt sorry for him. The loud-speaker had again become audible. 'I wish somebody would wring that Perkins boy's neck,' she said. 'He's probably giving a cocktail party. He has bad eyes.'

Jasper would not be diverted. 'It seems so funny for it to have happened to *me*,' he said, rather pathetically. 'I thought at least I'd never have to worry about anything of that sort. Because any reasonably intelligent man can go on living with his wife if he uses a little will power. It's not hard — or oughtn't to be. It seems to have got me when I wasn't looking. . . .'

Nina looked up at his distress and at his troubled perplexity over it. 'Jasper,' she said suddenly, 'I wish you would let me be sentimental about you. You're a nice boy, Jasper. No — I know — you won't. I can't tell just what kind of absurd mess this is that you've got yourselves into. But don't go

around talking about failures. There aren't any. . . . Ring for the maid, will you?'

The maid came for the tea things, bustled about, dumped ash-trays, and retired, leaving the conversation in a wreck. Nina, through half-closed eyes, had a certain picture of Jasper's wife. But she was not sure. She still failed, irritatingly, to *see* her. 'I'm going out to dinner,' Jasper was saying, 'so I guess I'd better go.'

'Forget about being a failure,' she said.

'But I was,' he insisted, standing by the door.

'Stuff!' said Nina. 'But Jasper,' she added, a little maliciously, 'how *could* you have said what you did to her — in the automobile, I mean, after the wedding?'

'Why? Wasn't it a natural enough thing to say? What should I have said?'

'You needn't have said anything, you know,' Nina remarked in a tone of dainty thoughtfulness. 'You might have put your arms around her. . . .'

But he did not, I suppose, understand what she was talking about.

When, a little later, Nina's husband wandered irrelevantly into the room — Nina's husband was always remarkably irrelevant in her presence — he found her sitting there and staring at the floor. 'What impossible idiots,' she said, 'all of you are.'

'Yes, my dear?'

'Not you,' said Nina, 'Jasper. He's been telling me his troubles.'

'They do, occasionally,' said her husband. 'But at any rate, now you know what all the shooting's been about.'

Nina shook her head. 'He tells me she is mysteri-

ous, so I suppose she's another of these little stupids. And he seems to have started in browbeating her with that wretched intelligence of his. But I have an idea,' said Nina, 'that it was she who hooked him. In which case, serves her right.'

'Everything,' said Billy Bradstreet equably, 'always serves everybody right.'

'Yes,' said Nina, 'I suppose it does. But I wish he weren't so susceptible. . . .'

Sigourney, in the meanwhile, had started out to keep his dinner engagement. The Bradstreet apartment, it is necessary to explain, was on the second floor of a new building somewhere along in the East Fifties. Its front door opened into a small elevator hall — one of those excessively neat and tanklike vestibules, which contained, besides the glass portals of the elevator shafts and Nina's own entrance, three tin doors painted into the rich mahogany of what might be called the filing-case style. Two of them communicated with the emergency stairway leading from above and below, and the third led into one of those mysterious janitor's cupboards that are always occupied by dark-looking rags, a pail and some sinister plumbing, suggestive of a privately maintained apparatus for the disposition of corpses, or for similar evil purposes. The doors were all precisely alike.

Sigourney, emerging into the hall and half turning to shut the door behind him, became suddenly conscious of something like a flurry or excitement going on in that ordinarily mausoleum-like place. There was a slam-bang and a rush; he looked up, startled, and received the surprising impression of a woman diving bodily into the janitor's bath-tub arrangement. At least, she jerked open the door, saw what it

was, and jumped back. Catching sight of Sigourney, she seemed abruptly to compose herself, walked gravely toward one of the stairway doors, opened it, and appeared to be rather taken aback when she found that it led upstairs and was the one through which she had just entered. It had a ludicrous effect, and Sigourney couldn't help grinning as the girl steered uncertainly, but with dignity, toward his cousin's entrance.

'That's no good,' he said. 'It's one of the apartments.'

'I'm trying to get out . . .' said the girl.

'Why not try the elevator?'

'I haven't time,' said the girl, in a tone of the most perfect and unhurried composure.

Sigourney grinned again. 'Yes, I noticed that you seemed to be in a bit of a hurry.' He moved toward the remaining piece of tin mahogany, in order to open it for her; but in the act of moving, he realized that her large eyes were intently upon him. And then, of course, they recognized each other.

He stopped, with his hand on the knob. 'Good Lord!' he exclaimed, and blushed violently.

'Yes,' said Anne. 'But I want to get out, please.'

He swung the door open for her. 'Let me go down with you.' Without replying she marched calmly through and down the stairs. In the brilliancy of the entrance-hall on the ground floor the elevator porter, sitting by the telephone cage, regarded them with an uninterested disfavor. People could walk downstairs if they wanted to. The elevator porter, who was not a close observer of human nature, had long ago given up trying to supply reasons for what the inhabitants of his apartment did. He went on the general and

perhaps too accurate theory that they were probably bad. He was writing a play about it.

'Thanks a lot,' she said, with the full sweetness of that wonderful smile of hers.

Jasper, in a sudden agony of embarrassment, wanted to explain. 'But wait a minute,' he said. 'Why, look here, you've torn your what-you-may-call it, your dress thing.'

She looked down. The damage was not, in fact, essential, but there was a rip about four inches long across the shoulder, as if some one might have grabbed at her and caught the collar of her dress.

'Don't you want to step back upstairs and fix it——?' He stumbled in a sudden confusion. 'I mean,' he elaborated hastily, 'it's my cousin's place; she'll give you needles and things.'

'No. I'll pin it. Have you got a pin?'

Jasper was just methodical enough always to carry three in the lapel of his coat. It was an old-fashioned trick of his father's. She turned her back upon him to repair the damage. 'Of course,' he said, 'I hadn't the faintest sort of notion that I'd ever lay eyes on you again. I'd never have dreamed of saying what I did otherwise. Though I guess that's no excuse.... But you must forgive me. I'm terribly sorry.' She nodded casually, without raising her head from the work of mending. 'Honestly,' said Jasper, 'I don't know how to apologize....'

Anne smoothed down the dress and looked brightly up at him. 'Don't,' she said. 'I'd forgotten about it. I mean, I'd forgiven you. The moon *was* splendid, you know. Of course I forgive you. I suppose I ought not. But I generally do the things I oughtn't. Like going up there' — and she nodded her head

toward the stairway — 'with Westmoreland Perkins. Perhaps it was silly of me. But as a rule I don't seem to regret them especially. The things I ought not to do, I mean.'

She finished this up with another of her brilliant smiles. 'Gosh,' Sigourney thought, recalling the evening upon which this girl had spoken to him out of a clear sky upon the Pont des Arts, 'gosh! I didn't remember how God-awfully lovely she is.'

'Well,' said Anne, glancing at her dress again, 'I think that will do. Thanks, awfully.'

'No, wait, let me take you where you're going,' Jasper exclaimed, feeling that he had not begun to do justice to the situation. 'I'll get a taxi. Hey there, George, a taxi!'

She watched the porter morosely abandon the meditation of his third act, and vanish through the front door into a series of irritated whistles, heard distantly from the corner of Madison Avenue.

'You needn't come,' she said.

'No, but really — you aren't in any sort of a state. . . . What on earth's been happening to you?'

'Nothing,' she said, with perfect candor.

He must have looked involuntarily at her dress, which certainly called for explanation. 'It was just that he got silly,' she said. 'So I thought I'd better come away. So I did. That's all.'

'Good Lord! I'll say you did. You fetched that janitor's cupboard hitting on all six and then some.'

'Well, you see,' Anne explained, smiling once more, 'he seemed to want to come too, so I thought I'd better not wait. That was why I didn't ring for the elevator. It was just that I got mixed up on your landing; the stairs are always different on the second floor.'

Jasper was very much astonished. 'You mean that the man was actually running after you?'

'Well, he didn't really. But he looked as if he would have liked to——' She broke off a little abruptly. 'But I never know what men are going to do. You do such extraordinary things.'

'Not all of us,' exclaimed Jasper hotly. 'Not by a long shot! Your friend must be a pretty rotten specimen.... I say, he must be that Perkins fellow that gets on my cousin's nerves so much! Good Lord, if he's that kind I don't blame her. But I hope you don't take him as a fair sample....'

'Of course not,' said Anne. 'But you all can be — unexpected. Why,' she said, with a light film of amusement in her great eyes, 'you surprised me yourself once, you know.'

Jasper turned purple with embarrassment, because he was really, as his cousin said, a thoroughly nice boy. She laughed outright, that low laugh of hers, and looked at him with a certain renewal of interest. She remembered how, in Paris, she had been struck by the peculiar quality of the boy's embarrassment — 'as if,' she had said to herself, 'he got embarrassed all over and all down inside him.' It was a kind of bafflement. Now, at any rate, Jasper baffled himself into silence. Anne said nothing. There was a slightly awkward pause until the porter came back with the taxicab.

His agitation did not prevent him from climbing in after her; it had precisely the opposite tendency. He had to make apologies, you see. He wanted to explain. Jasper was always wanting to explain, wanting to get things into order, even (or especially) when there wasn't any order to get them into. He

hated indeterminate incidents that left one hanging in the air. But he didn't know how to begin. They rolled off down the Avenue, Anne studying the boy in her calmly empirical fashion and the boy studying, principally, the successive traffic policemen. They got down past the Library, and past Tiffany's and past Madison Square, and still he had not explained. . . .

Suddenly Anne seemed to be amused. 'You don't seem as talkative as you were in Paris,' she said. 'Are you being shocked?'

'Shocked? Good heavens, no.' He actually stuttered his protestations. This girl, it was clear to him, could do nothing that was shocking. It would be like an indignity even to think so. It was the unique effect which Anne was apt to have on people, especially susceptible people. There was a certain coolness in her — or perhaps it was that she was cold. You might have found her walking out of the most compromising situation imaginable, and yet you would have fallen down and sworn on forty Bibles that she had been there for no reason except a noble one. At least, young men like Jasper would have done so.

'No,' he said. 'But see here, I only don't want you to think that I'm a bad sort. I'm not in the habit of doing things like that night in Paris. I don't want you to think that I'm just a rotter.'

'I don't. Why should I? Because you were honest with me?'

'Good Lord. Is there anybody in the world who wouldn't be?'

'I don't think Westmoreland Perkins was — quite.'

'I'd like to punch his head off!' Jasper exclaimed.

'Would you? How sweet of you! You know, I

don't think any one ever offered to punch any heads off for me before.'

He started a sheepish apology.

'Oh,' she said, 'I like it. But I wouldn't hurt Westmoreland, really, if I were you. It would surprise him too much. I don't think he would understand it at all. . . .'

Anne, the picture of this boy punching the head of an astonished and uncomprehending Perkins suddenly vivid to her imagination, laughed outright in the cab. Jasper grinned. They were all at once extremely friendly. 'All right,' he said, 'I won't damage the Perkins rat.'

'But I like people who offer to do it,' said Anne. 'You must come to see me sometime. Are you one of the tea sort, or aren't you? I can entertain both varieties.'

By the time the cab-driver had finally been shooed around enough back alleys to get him into Charles Street, Sigourney did not feel ready to leave her. They stood on the steps. A radio was playing 'Yes, We Have No Bananas' somewhere in the summer dusk, to the amateur accompaniment of a pair of cymbals; two street Arabs down the block were engaged in loud and bitter recrimination; a baby was crying, and a young man was sitting in an upper window opposite to them, giving himself abortive lessons on the saxophone. Sigourney did not notice all that. He could have stayed indefinitely upon those steps. . . .

VII

Thus, as a matter of history, their encounter was nothing more than pure, irresponsible accident. Nina afterwards used to insist that Casimir Morgan must have had some sort of mysterious hand in it, but that was only one of Nina Bradstreet's ideas. Jasper had brought the man to her apartment one afternoon, and she had detested him, on sight. But whatever else he may have done, he certainly had nothing to do with this. It was merely one of those fortuitous chances out of which existence appears to be woven. One has only to read the newspapers to know that people are always getting killed or getting saved in the most irrelevant fashion imaginable, finding diamond necklaces or losing trains with the profoundest effects upon their after lives, but without the smallest approach to an intelligible reason. . . . This particular event was of a less dramatic order; in its ultimate consequences, perhaps, it was a no less interesting one.

It goes without saying, I suppose, that Jasper fell in love with her. It is not so easy to explain why she should fall in love with him. There was, of course, the memory of the bridge over the Seine. And Jasper was a type of man which is attractive to women in certain of their moods. There were other factors as well. For one thing, she was not getting on very rapidly with her ambitions for the stage. The difficulties it seemed were numerous. That neither surprised nor dismayed her, for Anne had taught herself that things are difficult; but she confided to Sue Porter one day that she had more or less given up the idea

of the little theaters. It hardly seemed worth while. A lot of drudgery in some made-over carriage barn in the slums, dabbling in a lot of precious little plays with a lot of precious little people, drinking coffee in the intervals and talking bad imitations of Oriental philosophies. 'I know,' she said, 'that some people accomplish a lot by starting that way. But it must depend on the person. It's not exactly my idea. It doesn't seem practical to me. And I hate Oriental philosophies.'

It was Anne's conviction that philosophy was a somewhat foolish game, invented by men who were too stupid to enjoy life in order to avoid boring themselves to death. She put it in the same class with bridge, if a grade or two higher. But Anne must have been a little bored herself. At any rate, she continued to make a friend of Sue, although they were of such obviously different tempers; and I suppose the reason was that she had found no one else to be friendly with.

However, it was in Sue's apartment, one afternoon, that she abruptly ran into Hogarth Stubbs. Just how he got there I don't know, for Hogarth by that time was a successful writer of farce-comedies, quite above Sue Porter's level, and had half the Algonquin Club thinking up phrases in which to proclaim him as a new light in the firmament of American humor. He was of that efficient sort, and one would be much more apt to find him at parties given by wealthy literary ladies in the Park Avenue section than in West Eleventh Street. But he was there one day, drinking tea with rum in it and experiencing the pains of ennui, when he suddenly saw this charming young woman rise up before him out of his memories

of the long-legged little girl he had once providentially encountered in old Charley Martin's Columbia Heights apartment. And Anne found herself confronting the man whom she had never even wanted to forgive.

But he was a success; and so she tackled him, with her large eyes, her winning smile, her perfect self-composure — not because she wanted to, you understand, but because she thought it her duty to herself.

'But you certainly know all the managers, all the important people. It's getting the first chance that counts so much. It's really a matter of introductions, you know.'

Stubbs waved his hands vaguely. 'To be sure,' he said, regretting a little, as he returned her smile, that he had been so much preoccupied in those days, 'of course, whatever I can do. Now, there are the Cherry Lane people, for example. I don't know any of them myself, because all this is a bit out of my line ——'

He had adopted the air of kindly but conscious distinction. But Anne, he perceived, was not interested. 'No,' she said, 'I meant on Broadway. I've tried the little theaters. You mustn't think,' she added brightly, 'that I want you to be responsible for me. I only thought you might not mind giving me an introduction, here and there. Of course, I'll stand on my own feet.'

He tried the bedside manner — the familiar manner of prominent people officiating at what they earnestly hope will be the last bedside of juvenile hopes. 'If you had experience,' he said with a factitious joviality, 'why, you would go like a house afire. You've got the — the personality, you know. In fact, my dear girl, why you want to waste yourself

drudging around on the stage at all I don't see. There's nothing in it — for people who don't have to. I wish I didn't.' He allowed himself the appropriate slight sigh. 'But it takes experience, and a lot of it.' And he dismissed the matter with an accurate gesture of his cress sandwich.

'No,' said Anne, 'it doesn't. There's Babbington, for example; they say she knew so little about it that they had to teach her how to speak English. Or there's that girl from the Middle West who simply walked out of a social début last year into a Broadway lead ...'

'Oh, as for her,' said Stubbs, realizing I suppose that it was a case for strong measures, 'well, you know how that happened. Every one says that she's his mistress ...'

'I know they say it. But I don't believe it. Do you?'

And at that Hogarth frankly stared at her.

'It's not that I don't know there's plenty of hard work,' said Anne calmly, 'but there's plenty of opportunity, too. Why, there is no one on the stage now, except Eva Le Gallienne or Katherine Cornell perhaps, or one or two others.'

He looked at her to see whether she meant it, and found that she did. It was a shock to Hogarth. 'My dear girl,' he said, 'you don't need any introductions. Just walk in on 'em. But if there's ever anything I can do ——' And he extricated himself from the conversation.

Later he repeated it to Cass Morgan. 'But I guess,' said Morgan, 'that you don't ordinarily waste your time over every young woman who happens to want you to make her into an actress?' 'Hell, no,'

said Hogarth, 'but can I protect myself from this one? She's a charming woman without the faintest conception of her own limitations —— It's damned dangerous. When that kind gets after you, what can you do?'

He could have done nothing. It was Anne, as a matter of fact, who failed to push matters. I don't know why, unless it was a certain fastidiousness in her — or a certain inertia. It is possible that by nature she was more strictly an observer than she knew herself. 'A charming woman who hasn't the faintest conception of her own limitations.' Even if Hogarth did spend his time writing about farce-comedy characters, he may have had some insight into human characters as well. His judgment, at any rate, seems more profound than Jasper Sigourney's, which was on a different order.

Nina, who had begun as a matter of occupation to take an interest in her cousin, appreciated very quickly that something new had swum into his vision. It seemed that there was a girl. 'Honestly, you know,' he said, 'she's really lovely; and she has a mind, too.' Nina prodded him along, deftly and without obtrusiveness. As she told her husband: 'I'm actually acquiring a facility in translating Jasper's accounts of his lady friends. It's fascinating — like hieroglyphics.' So she encouraged him, without his perceiving the fact. 'George!' said Jasper, 'I don't know when —— And she seems to have had rather hard lines, too. Lost her father and mother, and she's been living in those respectable, back-alley sort of places in Paris for years. She has just come back. It's queer, isn't it,' he said, 'to see how really fine people get into all kinds of trouble. It's a platitude;

but when you actually *see* some one —— She's like,' he broke off, 'she's like a spearhead of beauty in a difficult world.'

'Bravo, Jasper!'

'You'd like her,' he concluded abruptly.

Of course, when men arrive at such obtuse non-sequiturs as that, there is nothing to do save smile at them and talk about something else. But when an earnest and honorable young husband begins to describe another woman as a spearhead of beauty in a difficult world, it is natural that your attention should be aroused.

When Jasper propounded this verdict he was fresh from a visit to the early-colonial, rag-rugged apartment in Charles Street. It was not his first visit, either; for Sigourney had discovered that there was something in Charles Street that made him enjoy going back there. Anne did have taste — taste with a flare of originality in it that made her rag-rugged apartment just a little unlike all the thousands of similar apartments which were flowering at that time, like innumerable concealed beds of gigantic peonies, all over New York. Her furniture, like her clothes, was always in the fashion, without ever being circumscribed by it. It seemed an expression of that coolness of temperament, which appeared to detach her from the run of ordinary people, to set her above the ruck of ordinary emotions. Even Sigourney noticed it; and Sigourney wanted to be detached from ordinary emotions and problems, such as this difficult problem of his relationship with his wife. It worried him, precisely because he was an honorable fellow, to the point at which he would be glad to leave it for a while, and think about something else. . . .

On this occasion another girl had been there — a faintly horse-faced young woman with an incisive mouth, who turned upon him the casual glance of contempt, and then persisted in interrupting the conversation in order to talk very emphatically about something to which he was not a party. She bore, it appeared, the obvious misnomer of Grace.

'But just a thousand more would do it. You can't deny that. I've *showed* you the estimates. You're a brick, of course, but it *isn't* charity.'

'No,' said Anne, 'of course not. That's not it at all. It's only that it wouldn't be fair to you unless I could carry out my part ——'

'But, my dear, there's *nothing* to carry out. It's all done already. I've got the option on the MacDougall Alley place and the rest is all fixed.'

Jasper did not like her.

'That's not precisely what I mean,' said Anne slowly. 'It's just that I don't like to begin a thing unless I feel entirely free, in my own mind, that is, to finish it. That's the only reason why I've hesitated.' She turned away. 'Jasper, what do you ——'

'Oh,' interrupted the girl, 'it's that theater business you're still thinking of. My dear, what on earth ever possessed you to try to get anything out of Stubbs? He won't ever do anything for you.'

'I suppose not,' said Anne equably. 'I really didn't want to especially. But he used me once, and I didn't like it; so when I saw him it occurred to me that I might as well try to use him.'

'Of course,' said Grace snappishly. 'Use 'em all. The trouble is most men aren't any use. Like Stubbs. Vaporing all over the place like a self-satisfied codfish because he knows how to write a lot of rotten bad

dialogue. It's enough to make any reasonable being howl. I'd howl myself if I weren't too busy trying to get something *done*! Men . . . !' she wound up, with an amazing energy of contemptuousness, as if she had bitten the collective head off all masculinity. Jasper began an entirely reasonable protest. 'Present company excepted, of course,' said Grace. 'I don't know anything about *you*. But the Stubbses, all of 'em —— No, you won't get anything out of him, my dear. But even if you do, coming in with me doesn't bind you to anything, you know. If you get a chance at Broadway later on you can always pull out.'

'Yes,' said Anne, 'I suppose so.'

'Then what's the argument?'

'Well, Grace, you see ——'

'You're just making up hesitations. Naturally, I'm not trying to persuade you, because it would be you who'd be saving my life. But here are the estimates. It's a matter of *fact*. If there were any argument about it . . . ?'

'No,' said Anne, 'I suppose there isn't any argument.'

'Well, then,' said Grace triumphantly, and immediately lapsed into a brown study to the complete neglect of both of them, which was distinctly a relief to Jasper. She remained silent and immobile for ten minutes, and then suddenly bounced out of her chair. 'Just a thousand,' she exclaimed, 'with a few dollars over for lighting, which I'd forgotten. You're a brick, and we'll make a million. I've got to run along now.' She looked at her wrist-watch, and vanished.

Anne observed the interrogatory look in Sigourney's eyes. They were good eyes, precisely as Westmoreland Perkins's were bad ones — frank enough, a

trifle diffident, sympathetic in that masculine fashion which is as much a request for sympathy as an offer of it. With the energetic passage of Grace, his presence seemed to lend a kind of friendliness to her apartment which it lacked when she was there by herself.

'I hope you didn't mind her,' said Anne. 'We are going into a kind of partnership together, one of these little bric-à-brac stores. You heard her say she's taken an option on a place in MacDougall Alley. You must come and buy things from us, you know.'

'I'll glory in it. . . . But I thought you didn't seem to be quite decided?'

'Why, really, yes. Grace is a splendid business woman.' Anne was convinced, among other things, that she understood men. But men had never lost for her their provocative and uncertain interest. Each example offered the fascination of the unexplored. Perhaps that was why she found herself explaining to this one her private motives.

'Grace gets things done,' said Anne. 'I'm not afraid of the shop's being a success. She was the daughter of a plumber in Chillicothe, Ohio, who I think was drunk most of the time and would have put her into some factory or other and let her kill herself over some stupid machine. Grace educated herself, made herself a stenographer, and got ahead. She taught herself everything, even how to wear her clothes. She drove ambulances in the war. I met her the other day at Sue Porter's. You see, she wants to start this shop, but she didn't have enough capital, and it's too silly for a woman like Grace to be stopped just because she hasn't got a little money.'

'So you're supplying the capital?'

'Some of it. Not all. I couldn't afford to — what do you call it? — finance the whole thing. But you see she needed just this extra amount, otherwise the whole scheme would have gone to pieces. And she's worked so desperately hard all her life, and accomplished so much. Why,' Anne exclaimed with her bright smile, 'any one would have helped out, of course. There isn't anything especially generous about it.'

'But, good Lord,' said Jasper, 'you're risking a thousand dollars just to help a chance friend out of a hole?'

'I don't think there's much risk. Grace is a good business woman. But it's only what any one would do.'

'No, they wouldn't. Not by a long shot. I say, you're a —— a ——'

'A what?' she asked with her light amusement.

He did not reply.

She laughed. 'It's funny,' she said, 'but in point of time, at least, you are actually the oldest friend I have in New York, except for a few acquaintances.... The only trouble was — and I couldn't ever make Grace understand that — that a person hesitates to tie one's self, even by a generosity, as you call it ...'

Jasper nodded.

'Or especially,' she said, 'by a generosity. It's not the money you risk, it's the other things.'

Ideas of that sort Jasper was quick to grasp. 'Yes,' he said, 'you can give a dime to a beggar and let it go at that. But I suppose you can't give a thousand dollars to a friend and ever let it go at that afterward. It makes you responsible ...'

'Exactly,' said Anne. 'One always has to be sure of one's self.'

'But *you* are.'

'No. Do you think so?'

'Yes,' he said, with great conviction. She did not contradict him.

But the boy all at once seemed to be thinking about something else. The sudden preoccupation, for a reason which she did not stop to explore, jarred upon her. 'And besides,' she said, in a less intimate tone, 'I would have to put a lot of time into it. I suppose I shouldn't talk business anyway.' But the young man had come back abruptly to the apartment, and to an enormous and frank admiration for herself. Anne noted that. What she noted less clearly was the fact that she liked it. . . .

It was with this incident fresh in his mind that he produced his eulogistic simile. He was simply overwhelmed by her innate goodness of heart. It seemed as natural and necessary to her to throw her money into that uncertain enterprise as it would have been to ask a guest to have another cup of tea. 'A spearhead of beauty ——' he called her. He saw her in his imagination as a fine point, finely tempered, with a gleam of light upon it amid the obscurity of the world's absurdities.

For Jasper had an imagination. As a matter of fact, Anne's generosity was a bit less pure than she had allowed him to believe, which is the same thing as saying that it was less pure than she believed herself. She underrated Grace's powers of persuasion, which were not always appreciated by those upon whom they were exercised. Grace had reminded her once of that American Y.M.C.A. girl with the hard eyes,

who had said that it was her motto to take what she wanted. . . . On the other hand, Anne was finding that she was really in need of something to do. Anne would never admit this to herself. She could not admit it, because she believed passionately in the self-sufficiency of the cultivated soul, and it would have damaged her conception of her own personality. Having deliberately established herself alone in Greenwich Village, it was indispensable that the experiment should prove a success. The trouble was that it was not particularly interesting. She was too coolly fastidious for Sue Porter's friends to awake more than an objective interest; and the difficulty with more important people was that they were so apt to want to be important. Anne was not a hero worshiper.

On another occasion Jasper at last summoned the courage to ask her about her visit to Westmoreland Perkins's apartment. It had of course been bothering him immensely, but it had seemed so embarrassing a subject. He wanted to find out why she had gone there.

'I don't know,' she said vaguely, but without any embarrassment at all. 'I don't know. Because I was curious, I suppose.'

'But you must have known well enough what he wanted you to go up there with him for?'

'Yes,' said Anne, 'I imagine I did. People talk so much about those things, you know. There are some people, like Westmoreland, for instance, who seem to get all they ever get out of life that way. He asked me to go up with him to have a cocktail, and it occurred to me that I would like to, so I said I would. I suppose really,' she said, with the brightness of

one making a discovery, 'it was only that I wanted to find out whether there was anything *in* it—— Yes, it must have been that.'

'I don't quite see——' said Jasper, who was so often in the act of not quite seeing. 'You mean it was the spirit of adventure.'

'Maybe.... No. Adventure? What was there adventurous about that? I suppose I just wanted to find out. Then of course he began making what the newspapers call "improper advances" and it all seemed rather ugly. And then he seemed to get excited, so I bolted.'

'Oh.'

'Naturally. You know,' she said, 'I don't think he ran after me at all. He grabbed my dress, of course, but I wasn't frightened by that. I might have started yelling and somebody would've come. It was something else I was running away from.... I didn't like it. When you brought me away in the cab, I thought you were being shocked at me. I was running away from that—— I think——'

'But I wasn't being shocked,' he protested. 'I couldn't be shocked by anything you did, ever. I hated even to think that you thought so.'

'Yes,' said Anne meditatively. 'I don't care what people think about me. But it must have been that.'

Sigourney turned the enigmatic conclusion over in his mind. 'But as a matter of fact,' he said at length, 'it wasn't quite fair of you. Perkins is a slimy little rat. Still, you oughtn't to have gone with him on that basis. It was like taking an advantage of him....'

'Was it?' There was a pause. 'But men don't mind taking advantage of people,' she said. There

was another pause. 'And anyway, I told you not to punch his head. . . .'

But the point is that she had visited Perkins to see if possibly there might not be 'something in it.' It seems almost in the nature of a confession. At any rate, when Grace Taylor had suddenly pinned her with the declaration: 'You've got yourself pretty well fixed here, but you aren't getting anything for it out of life, my dear, at *this* rate,' she had been willing enough to listen. Grace had gone on to sketch out her energetic plans for a new art shop — a batik and Italian peasant pottery affair — and it had occurred to her that it might be amusing. And if her subsequent readiness to help out Grace sprang, as far as she knew, from a generous impulse, nevertheless Anne was getting something for her thousand dollars. Perhaps she might better have handed over the money and stuck more tenaciously to her theatrical ambitions. All that can be said is that she did not.

At all events, the partnership was established, and Anne threw herself into it with enthusiasm. Grace ran the business. Anne, with the aid of a rather stupid girl from Jersey City, ran the shop, and she had the principal word in the selection of their stocks. It was a queer association. Anne was so cool, so winning, with that large placidity which one might almost have been forgiven for taking as slowness. Grace was so harsh, so contemptuous and so violently active. Her early training in the plumber's shack at Chillicothe, where if one's little brother grabbed one's piece of sugar one whacked him on the head and grabbed it back again, was never very far below the surface of her character; but it was a tribute to her ability that it never quite emerged. She had learned the import-

ance of dressing well, and she knew how to make the most of her sex — though it would have been difficult to imagine a less feminine person. She could not enter a room without making you think of a fashionably gowned whirlwind perpetually about to ask you to do something for it which would be — you knew beforehand — something you didn't want to do. She had a complete confidence in her own ability. But Anne, for that matter, never seemed to have any doubts about herself. They were immensely different. But they were similar, for all that. Morgan, who paid one visit to the batik shop, lumped them together as 'a couple of hi-jackers,' and said that he was not going back again.

Nevertheless, Anne was not temperamentally adapted to a close association with whirlwinds. It made the recurrent visits of this earnest, not very witty, but interestingly minded young man something of a relief. He would drop into the batik store occasionally when he happened to be passing, and although Anne did not spend all of her time there, the stupidity of the young woman from New Jersey resulted in her spending a great deal more of it there than she had anticipated. Grace was hardly in the shop at all, and that may have assisted in preventing a break-up of the partnership. Grace was always dashing about the city, 'wangling' (as she called it) all sorts of things — advertising or credit or cheap transportation or Heaven only knows what — out of unknown people whom she referred to by their last names alone, without a handle. Anne imagined these business men — a shadowy, harassed and incompetent army, being perpetually browbeaten in the interests of the batik and Italian pottery trade.

She preferred the customers, with whom she had to deal.

There was one in particular, an excessively neat lady in an excessively fastidious mouse gray. She fitted exactly into the rather trying colors of the shop, not as if she owned it, but as if it were of no consequence who owned it. She might, Anne fancied, have chosen the mouse gray on purpose, because amid all the greens and blues and brick reds and yellows of their wares it was not only in perfect taste, it was also strikingly conspicuous.

'But you don't really mean to tell me, my dear young lady,' she said, ruffling a tray full of batiks, 'that people want to *buy* green sunflowers sketched by an intoxicated spider?'

'Yes,' said Anne, 'they do.'

The lady shot a glance at her. 'Dear me,' she sighed, 'I really know so little about these things. The cream-jugs, for instance, cream-jugs that resemble explosions ——'

It was obvious to Anne that the lady at least didn't want to buy any of these things. She was astonished when the lady did abruptly buy a cream-jug, a bowl, and three of the batiks. 'But you have an extremely nice place,' she said, not looking at the place at all, but at Anne.

'I am glad you like it. I,' said Anne, who could not bear patronage, 'have a good deal of fun out of it. You must let me give you a card.'

Nina smiled at her, waving back the card. 'You don't need to. I already know about your venture, from a young cousin of mine. It seems to have interested him. Jasper Sigourney, you know. It interests me, too.'

It struck Anne that there must be something faintly queer about this.

'You must be the cousin that he has told me of,' she said.

'Yes,' said Nina. 'He's a silly creature. But I'm rather fond of him, you know. . . . Really, my dear, he doesn't exaggerate, it seems. You must come to see me some time.'

Nina, apparently, could not help disseminating an atmosphere of ulterior purposes. 'I should love to,' said Anne. 'Do you want me to have them sent?'

'Don't trouble. I'll take them in the car. But you must come. Perhaps I might even be of some help to you. I like to see the younger generation starting all these shops and things. It seems so efficient of you.'

Anne supposed that if there were an ulterior purpose she would discover it sooner or later. One generally did.

When she mentioned the incident to Grace, the latter said that perhaps there was some use in her having that boy around after all, because if the woman really had money her offer of help might be of service. She said that she would like to 'expand,' if they had the capital. And it was no use going to banks, because it was all small-scale and a speculation. Anne regretted that she had said anything about it to Grace.

Jasper would frequently stop in on his way home from his work, help her to add up her shop accounts, and take her with him somewhere for dinner. He had explained to her that he had taken a temporary position in the home office of his engineering firm. It was only a draughtsman's job, but it was good enough for

the time being. By this time she knew more than a little of his private difficulties. He told her that he was not yet ready to return to the South, or to make up his mind. 'And I like drawing things, too,' he said. 'I don't mind working with my hands. And it keeps me a place with the firm.'

It seemed that there was a mistake in her addition. He went to work at it very methodically, checked off the figures, put his finger on the error. 'Sixty-four thirty-two. So that's all right. But I say, you know, you don't seem to be taking in much money. Is this just a bad day, or is it a fair average?'

'What?'

He repeated the question. She hadn't been thinking of the account at all. She had been thinking that she liked to see him there, sitting down to go to work over her accounts, in that rather flamingly fantastic background supplied by the shop. It was a romantic shop. Too romantic, sometimes, too fantastic; it tired her with all its shouting colors. It had been a stupid day, anyhow. She had rowed with Grace; she had come near to rowing with a customer. And now he said that they were doing badly.

'I don't know,' she said. 'Grace attends to all that.'

'You're tired,' said the boy suddenly. 'I didn't mean to be dumb. Of course, I don't know anything about your business. It was stupid of me to bother you.'

Anne, dropped with that large-eyed immobility of hers into a big wicker chair, looked slowly up. Jasper, facing her, had rested his two elbows on the table, his chin in his hands. All at once there seemed to her to be something indefinably personal in the glance

which met her own. It was not passion, nor merely friendship, nor affection — it was nothing of that sort at all, but simply an impression of aliveness, of a life outside her own or of the images of her mind, and yet directed upon her. A sense of their common humanity. It was very vivid to her in the growing dimness of the shop, with all that glowing stuff about on the tables and shelves, like the setting of a futurist play. She extended her hand down the arm of her chair, in his direction, almost automatically, as if she were cautiously testing out the strength of some suddenly offered support.

'Was it stupid?' she asked him. 'Why?'

'Why, I only meant ——'

'I know what the words mean,' said Anne. 'I wondered what you mean. You are always polite. But does it really matter whether I'm bothered or not?' Anne turned her head away from him, looking through the window at nothing. 'To any one in particular?' she added. She knew that he was about to make a generous, and consequently unpenetrating, protest. I suppose it was an instinctive appreciation of the falseness of her own sentiment that made her hurry over the moment. 'There was a silly woman to-day . . .' she said. 'I lose all patience sometimes. Why *should* I be spending my time luring idle women into buying things they don't want? I suppose they don't want them. Or they don't know what they want. . . .' She turned toward him again with a sudden smile. 'It's too stupid of me, isn't it? But some days — such as this one — I just don't like it.'

'I shouldn't think you would,' said the boy. 'I've thought it must be a pretty rotten business, stuck here in this shop most of the day. It's not your

line. . . . Look here, why don't you pull out? You're too good for this kind of thing.'

What counted was that he believed what he said. That whole-hearted interest. 'You get pulled down,' said the boy. 'I've noticed.' Anne did not know whether really she were pulled down or not. She was inclined, privately, to doubt it. But that, of course, made no difference. . . .

'I can't,' she said. 'There's Grace. It's what we spoke of before. There are obligations, and you can't escape them.'

'Of generosity,' he said. 'I remembered what you said, because it impressed me. Honestly. But you can't afford to draw things too fine. You can't be idiotic. It won't really make any difference to Grace. She can take care of herself.'

'So can I,' said Anne.

'But you aren't doing it,' he said, and for some reason he did not seem to like her remark.

'Suppose I told Grace to-morrow that I was tired and was going to break up the partnership. Don't you see?'

'See what?'

'Grace can take care of her own affairs,' said Anne, looking at the floor, 'but how would I feel? The real obligation is always to one's self.'

But Jasper refused to accept that point of view. 'No,' he exclaimed, seeming all at once very much in earnest about it, 'there aren't any obligations except to other people. You're bound to respect others, naturally ——'

She smiled suddenly and winningly upon him, and it had the effect, as she had intended, of stopping him short. 'And that means that you must respect

yourself,' she said. 'When you've started something, it's impossible —— I don't know whether I believe in enlightened selfishness or not,' she said. 'I wish people wouldn't express things so stupidly. But I suppose it all comes down to the platitude in the end. One has to live one's own life. . . .' She broke off to exclaim quickly, 'What nonsense we're talking! Only I do wish sometimes that there weren't so many *things* — so many complications ——' She perceived that the boy had fallen suddenly very silent. 'Grace, for instance,' she remarked lightly.

Jasper accepted the change of subject, as if reluctantly. 'Well, I'll bet she hasn't got too many complications.'

'Grace? She has loads of them. I suppose that's why I like her.'

'Why, isn't she happy enough going around running her business and bossing people and being efficient? What else does she want?'

'She wants to get married,' said Anne.

'Married?'

'She doesn't know it, of course. There are a lot of women like her. You know the kind I mean. Business-like, masculine women. I suppose it's their emotions punishing them. They need a husband.'

'And can't get one?'

'You are charmingly dense sometimes,' said Anne. 'Grace could probably marry you to-morrow if she tried.' An odd look flashed in his face. 'I'm sorry,' she said, 'I forgot, for the minute, about your ——' She looked at him curiously. 'You know, you never seem to be a married man. . . . All I meant was that Grace isn't in the least the disappointed spinster. Don't you believe it.'

'Well, then?'

'She's afraid,' said Anne, 'that's all. You give up more in marriage — more of yourself — than she can bring herself to give up.'

'Maintaining her beastly freedom!'

'Don't be contemptuous. It isn't that entirely. If Grace had a husband, I don't think Grace would be any the less free. No,' said Anne in that quietly speculative tone which always impressed Jasper with a sense of an immemorial and esoteric wisdom, 'it is the loss to her personality. You see, she is Grace Taylor now. . . .'

'She'd never be anything else. If she married, the man would just be Grace Taylor's husband.'

'It's possible,' said Anne. 'It wouldn't make any difference though. She would have an appendage, maybe. But even an addition is an alteration, you know.'

Jasper looked as though he were about to argue with her. And then he changed his mind. 'Yes,' he said, 'I suppose so.'

'Sometimes I think I understand Grace very well,' said Anne. 'The reason why she wears herself to pieces doing things like this' — and Anne's eyes passed slowly about the now dim interior of the shop — 'is because she has to wear herself to pieces over something. And she hasn't any other outlet. I couldn't very well just go back on her.'

'Of course not,' said Jasper with a recurring wave of his unbounded admiration for this girl. 'I was a poor fish even to have suggested it.'

He was a nice boy, she thought, more than a nice boy; with a suggestion of some underlying and reliable strength about him. It might have been only

the strength of the commonplace, or the strength of a certain innate decency of outlook, or even (and this, though she failed to formulate the idea, hung in the background of her mind) the strength of his own intense admiration for herself. There drifted unaccountably into her thoughts the memory of those little boys and girls she had played with so long ago in the streets of Washington. He was something external, like them, something not wholly known; but yet he was something extraordinarily real, to her, as they had never been.

He seemed sunk in a brown study. She wondered a little just what there was behind his forehead. How, for instance, had he happened to get married? For he was married. For what was perhaps the first time the idea of Jasper's wife became a fact to her consciousness. That woman . . . ? She liked him very much, very much indeed. She did not trouble to enquire whether the boy was in love with herself. At the moment it was not relevant. And he was already married. So he couldn't marry her. . . . So, she thought suddenly, he couldn't *marry* her.

Jasper abruptly dropped his hands. 'Eh?'

'I didn't say anything,' Anne replied.

VIII

'You're in love with her,' said Morgan abruptly.

'Am I?' said Jasper.

'You damned fool.'

And I suppose any man who could under the circumstances make precisely that reply to that statement might be considered a damned fool. Damned, at least, to a complicated and sufficiently unpleasant future. . . . For some reason the three of us were again collected in that abominable little whitewashed den, with its enormous and somehow ironic soup-kettle. Like a perpetual bad joke. Or like a cauldron in which Morgan, after the departure of his visitors, might have been in the habit of boiling up the follies of humanity, with incantations, for his own cynical amusement. Sigourney sat perfectly blankly in his chair, tilted back, as he had been before, and staring in the same imbecile way at the dirty window-panes, as if he were staring at his fate. The unshadowed glare from that tin lampshade filled the room with an incredible harshness of illumination, which seemed almost to add to the crudity, the impertinence of Morgan's declaration. You might have expected an outburst in reply. 'Am I?' the boy had said, perfectly simply.

I may as well say that I never did learn how or where these two had first encountered each other, or what bond it was which united them. Perhaps I never tried to, for it was a part of Casimir's unpleasant but morbidly fascinating mystery that he seemed to have these unexpected connections, these

subterranean contacts, these surprising associations with the events and people about him. Surprising, that is, in a cynic who really made you believe that he had neither past nor future and made neither love nor money. For what can a man in that situation possibly have to do with ordinary human life at all? Nothing, unless one should resort to such nonsense as regarding him, for example, as a kind of symbol of life itself. But that is obviously absurd.

At all events, I never asked him how they had met, though I did once ask Jasper why he continued the acquaintance. Jasper said that he didn't know, that he supposed he really liked to argue with the fellow. 'He has insufferable ideas.' But it was always a little more than mere argument; at bottom, I think, it was war. In their presence I could never quite avoid that sense of an obscure but somehow deadly struggle — as if they were friends only because it was so important to each to destroy the other. It was very queer; they were like champions. What was it about? I don't quite know. But perhaps that was the truth; perhaps they were champions, and necessary to each other as opponents, without whom a champion in the nature of things ceases to have any existence.

'Am I?' Jasper repeated, and then in a tone of weariness rather than anger, as if he were fulfilling without interest a prescribed obligation: 'It's none of your damned business.'

'No, it's not,' said Morgan. 'But it's yours. Good God, you aren't a two-year-old baby! Watch your step, look where you're going. Get a wiggle on, wake up!' It seemed impossible that the cynic could actually have an interest in Sigourney, but I was startled to see what energy he put into his tone.

Jasper showed no sign of movement whatever. 'It's none of your business, Morgan,' he repeated, a little dully. 'And even if it were — well, what do you know about it?'

'Listen, son, I know a lot more about it than you think ——'

'Yah!' interrupted the other. 'The gospel according to Cass Morgan. I'm tired of all that bunk.' His eyes roaming across the room suddenly encountered my own, and abruptly he appealed to me. 'What *does* he know about it?' he demanded. 'You couldn't even begin to explain it to him. . . .'

It was sufficiently embarrassing. 'Can you explain it to yourself?' I asked.

'Yes,' said Jasper. 'I mean, no. But it's just not that way — not that way at all.'

'Listen, son,' said Morgan again, 'I don't need such a hell of a lot of explanation as you do. I know that girl through and through. I can see all the way from her eyes right down to her pretty little heels, I tell you. I've seen her at work, haven't I? Just because she can wind every fool man she meets around one finger, you think she's a million-dollar twin-six model with four-wheel brakes *and* all the bells on.'

'All right,' said Jasper. 'You can start quoting Schopenhauer now. It's about time.'

'Well, she isn't,' said Morgan curtly.

'You're overdoing it, Cass,' I told him. It seemed to me that he was. The bitterness of his contempt was astonishing, as if he might have been personally engaged in the matter. 'You know this girl has a quality in her ——'

'Quality be damned,' said Morgan. 'You're like all the rest. She's taken you in too, I suppose. She

seems to make everybody take her at her own valuation.'

Jasper looked up quickly. 'What do you mean by that?'

'What I say. Take Sue Porter for example — she just swims along and has a good time. She'll make half a dozen messes out of her own and other people's lives and it won't matter a plugged nickel to anybody. This Martin girl's different. She fools everybody because she fools herself first. She's dangerous.' It was, for Morgan, something of an outburst. 'Don't I know?' he said. 'The Department of Public Works ought to hang a red light on her. She's got a false idea of herself. I can tell the world that I'm the best candidate for the Presidency of the United States that ever came down the pike, and nobody'll believe me because I won't believe it myself. But if I really thought so ——'

'You'd be in the White House, I suppose.'

'Sure,' said Morgan, with a sudden relapse into his accustomed imperturbability, 'and I'd probably ruin the country. . . . Well, I know that Charley Martin's daughter isn't any white marble goddess. Good lord, sonny, this is the year Nineteen Twenty-three.'

Sigourney stared at him. Then he got up, lit a cigarette, and dropped the match carefully into the soup-kettle. 'Suppose we change the subject,' he said slowly. 'I'm not going to stay here and listen to this kind of talk about her. You can say all you want to about me.' The look of perplexity came into his face. 'But if you do,' he finished, 'you'll be as far off the track as Greenland. It's just not in any of your books. . . .' He left the sentence in the air, as if

the matter were too wearisome, or too deeply embedded in the facts of existence, to be explored.

'Have it your own way,' said Morgan. I was struck with a sudden sympathy for the boy. One could wish, with Morgan, that he would 'get a wiggle on.' The spectacle of humanity being encoiled in chance is never a pleasant one for other members of the species, who, so long as they themselves are not involved, like to cling to their belief in volition. But Morgan was going too far. Whether the boy was in love with her or not, I knew it was not as simple as all that. Nothing was ever as simple as all that to Jasper.

And Cass, it seemed to me, had failed to take into account the girl's undeniable fascination. To speak of her at all without speaking of that quality in her was merely absurd. Charm is a literally indescribable attribute, but it is the fact that Anne possessed it. Without effort, she made herself memorable to all those who came into contact with her; she seemed capable of moving even Cass Morgan to an unexpected access of bitterness upon his favorite theme. The enchantment she exercised was vivid, positive and immediate, and men and women alike responded to it in accordance with their predispositions. People adored her. But one can be the subject of an immense amount of casual adoration without getting much comfort out of it. 'There are so many things,' Anne had said, 'so many complications. . . .' And perhaps one can understand both the difficulties and the dissatisfactions of that rather impersonal regard. With Jasper, also, it was a kind of adoration, unconscious and imperceptibly developing. But with Jasper it was never casual.

Anne knew this well enough. Other men's faces

would frequently light up when they met her own; Jasper's interest seemed to be continuous, as if he never forgot about her at all. 'When I'm with you,' he once said, 'it seems as though I had been with you right along, as if everything I'd been doing since I was here last had just been dropped right out. But then,' he added, 'when I'm not here it seems as though the last time I'd seen you had been ages ago, and as if I weren't going to meet you again for another century or two. It's like living two lives, like those people with divided personalities. . . . And that's funny, isn't it?' he said, in a queer effort to regain a properly speculative attitude.

Anne would never have thought of calling it funny. It was much too agreeable. It seems to me that she might have been a little more alert as to the state of mind which could produce remarks of that sort. But Jasper did not seek for an explanation of his feelings, and if Jasper Sigourney did not, who should? The thing had simply grown up about him, without heat, like a mist drifting across a mountain-side. That it was likely still further to befog that domestic difficulty of his did not even occur to him, I suppose. It wasn't a grand passion. It was simply an admiration — an admiration for something which seemed to him of an unspeakable and unattainable fineness — a new fact in his life, and a fact so immense as to fill all of it and consequently not to matter. The more important things are, the more powerful, of course, is the natural instinct to evade them. Jasper continued, for example, his preoccupations concerning his marriage without at all appreciating that there were any new factors involved.

I don't know whether he was in love with her.

From his wife's point of view, of course, it was not altogether an upright attitude. It suggested a certain failure to face his responsibilities. But it is so hard ever to blame people. And so hard, also, ever really to know about them....

We left Morgan's publicity office together, and wandered off through that curiously populated desertion of New York's early morning streets. The chimes in the Metropolitan Life tower rang the three-quarters very clearly above us; a policeman passed down the street, swinging his club, and the roar of a subway train arose from the gratings underfoot. I did not like to ask him about his emotions. But I did ask him whether he had yet got himself a job.

'No,' he said. 'I'm well enough where I am for the moment. There's no hurry, so far as I can see. Neither is there any job.... Unless,' he said, with a laugh, 'you can call this crazy idea my cousin's got a job. Can you imagine it? She's been after me for the last week or two to go off and be a hired man for some friend of hers on a desert island.'

'A desert island!' I exclaimed. 'What on earth are you talking about?'

'Ask Nina,' he said, 'it's her idea. Of course, I don't really mean a desert island. It's a place somewhere off the New England coast—Maine, I think she said — but it must be a kind of wilderness from her account of it. All beach grass and bayberry bushes. She says there's nothing there except a cliff where you get a special kind of clay that's good for making high-grade china dishes or God knows what. She wants me to go and work this china mine. It's a grotesque notion.'

It did seem a little extraordinary. 'But you aren't

telling me,' I said, 'that Mrs. Bradstreet is going in for the manufacture of high-grade china dishes?'

'No, it's weird enough, but it's not quite as weird as that would be. It's a friend of hers. You know Westmoreland Perkins, don't you? Well, Nina knows his mother, because they happen to live upstairs over the apartment. She has more money than she knows what to do with, and she's interested in antique pottery and artistic teacups and things like that. Well, she's bought up this cliff, because it's really some very particular kind of clay, and she wants to go into large-scale production of artistic dinner-plates for American workmen or something of the sort. She seems to have got Nina all worked up over it.'

It would have sounded rather like mild insanity in any event; but to have Nina Bradstreet mixed up in it made it sound even more so.

'Nina has me slated as engineer in charge on the desert island,' he said. 'She tells me they worked this cliff years ago, and that there are a few broken-down buildings and some rusted machinery still there. But that was in the wild and woolly days of American culture, she says, when you couldn't sell artistic dinner-plates to anybody, much less workmen.'

We turned into one of those all-night Childs on the Avenue, where pancakes are flipped in surroundings of the most refined taste, and made a sleepy-looking waiter bring us Shredded Wheat. He talked idly about the china project because there was nothing else to talk about. Mrs. Perkins, it seemed, had bought the property with the intention of having the clay shipped to New York for manufacture. There was a lot of work to be done — installation of machinery, arrangements for shipping, hiring labor,

and so on — and Mrs. Perkins wanted somebody to do it for her. She didn't like the idea of contractors, because she had a suspicious temperament and was sure that they would cheat her. 'It's really not such a bad job — that is, if it wasn't going to go bust in six months.'

'But I don't see what Nina Bradstreet has got to do with it.'

'Don't ask me,' he said, dropping cigarette ashes into the remnant of milk at the bottom of his bowl. 'And she's no particular friend of this Mrs. Perkins, either. I suppose it's because she can't abide seeing things done badly, and Mrs. Perkins is one of these fussy old women who convince you ahead of time that they'll do everything about as badly as possible. Nina doesn't like inefficiency. She says that's why she never does anything herself.'

'So for the pure joy of seeing something done properly she's calling on you?'

'I suppose so,' he said. 'But gosh, it's only a couple of women. . . .'

It was obvious enough to me that Nina's interest was not in Mrs. Perkins or the china mine. 'I'm really surprised at your cousin,' I said, and I really was.

'Hm,' said Jasper, 'you know, a fellow thinks sometimes a desert island ——' At this point a bus boy came by with a mop and began banging it under our chairs. Jasper scrunched his feet out of the way, which gave him a look of extraordinary absurdity. '—— A desert island wouldn't be such a bad place. You could think about quite a lot of things ——' the bus boy banged around the other side and he scrunched his feet in the opposite direction '——once

you were free. Civilization!' he exclaimed. 'What a nuisance!' The mop went its way, piling up a miniature terminal moraine of cigarette ends, trash, and artificial sawdust. 'We aren't adapted for it. We won't be, I suppose, not for another couple of million years. And then there won't be any civilization.'

I asked him if he had told Nina that. 'No,' he said. 'I don't know. Honestly, though, a man does sometimes feel as though he needed fresh air. Fresh air,' he repeated, 'that's it. It's not freedom, because you never are free, not ever. But to get *away*. . . . You know,' he said abruptly, 'I wish I knew what I wanted out of the world.'

'Don't you?'

'No. What is there to want? To build a lot more factories or bridges or railroads or what not so that an increasingly larger percentage of the population can get 'emselves jobs as salesmen and make 'emselves unhappy buying Ford automobiles? Beautiful ideal for a man to work at, isn't it? About as intelligent as selling art teacups to laboring men.'

'Oh, come off!'

'I suppose it boils down to making a living and being a reasonably decent animal. But even that, as an ideal ——'

'At any rate,' I said, 'it's enough to work at.'

Jasper looked at me pretty steadily. 'The decency part?' he said at length. I nodded. 'No,' he said gravely, 'that ought not to be hard. Most people, I think, are *decent*. . . .' He dropped the end of his cigarette with sudden definiteness. 'Let's go,' he said abruptly. 'Ready?'

Jasper Sigourney did not know what he wanted. It is the modern complaint, but it occurred to me that

it might be rather a damaging one. One must have a spiritual basis for life, of some sort or other.

Nina Bradstreet, on the other hand, always knew exactly what she wanted. But this astonishingly unnatural interest in deserted islands led me to wonder whether she might not be encountering some difficulty in getting it. I knew that she was profoundly interested in the boy, but this seemed, for Nina, like heroic measures. And later she admitted as much to myself — tacitly. Nina asked me to call on her one afternoon. Sitting of necessity rather stiffly in one of her Louis XV chairs it all at once came into my head that I had been summoned to a conference, which was not at all like Nina. And sure enough, it was not long before Anne Martin's name had floated casually into the conversation.

'Well,' I demanded, 'did she ever accept your invitation?'

Nina tapped her foot upon the rug. 'Of course not,' she said impatiently. 'Don't be stupid.'

'You mean you never intended her to accept?'

'To come here? No; why should she? You must think I have an infinite capacity for the obvious. I made it quite indefinite. It was merely — encouragement.'

'But how could you have wanted to encourage the girl . . .?'

'Jasper doesn't see enough of women. It's the trouble with his marriage. He doesn't know enough about them.'

'Do you mean,' said I, 'that you were actually trying to create a diversion?'

'Oh, it's none of my affair at all,' said Nina, with an extreme casualness which failed to conceal the

fact that she was the prey to a suppressed vexation. 'I just wanted to see this Miss Martin. And dropping a word — what's a word, one way or another? — might have assisted, you know, in providing him with a perspective . . . I'm not in the habit of engineering — diversions.' The final word came out with a certain fastidious reluctance. Nina, I realized, had got herself into something of a mess, and she naturally hated appealing to me to help her out. But I didn't want to help her out; the proceeding annoyed me on the whole.

'Look here,' I said, 'I'm fond of Jasper, but everybody isn't standing around trying to shepherd this pet lamb of yours in the way you seem to be trying to do.'

'I wish you wouldn't be vulgar,' said Nina.

'I wish you would be, once in a while. You're too confoundedly delicate. The idea of your proposing to use Anne Martin to ——'

'To give him a wider viewpoint,' she interrupted. 'Why not? That was all. Don't you think she could understand that? I don't know whether women have intuition or not, but at least they have some intelligence.'

'She would understand it,' I said with some heat, 'if she wanted to stop to think about it. But your going down there and dropping a few delicate hints —— if you really want to know what I think, I think it was inexcusable. It's not her business in life to look after Jasper Sigourney. I don't suppose she cares what you were about, or what the boy is about. She has her own point of view, you know, and I fancy she sticks to it. . . .'

'Yes,' said Nina primly, 'I've gathered that —

subsequently.' And then her vexation broke right out, in a funnily restrained way. It wasn't anger nor distress — Nina was incapable of distress — it was just simple, if energetic, vexation. 'Say it was a mistake,' she exclaimed. 'Perhaps it was. I don't care. But don't you see, he's got to be got out of it! Away from both of them. He's just going to — going to *seed* here!'

'And what am I to do?'

'You know him,' said Nina. 'You talk with him. I suppose you have influence over him. I really think he ought to go to Mackerel Ledge. Really,' she said, almost pleading with me, 'there are all *sorts* of things in favor of it.'

'Honestly,' I said, 'I can't tell you how much you amaze me, Mrs. Bradstreet. Here you've gone to work and got up all this idiotic business about some china clay works ——'

'I detest the Perkinses. But why shouldn't it be all right? She has oodles of money. It'll last six months, anyway. That's all that's necessary . . .' She went on with an incredible seriousness explaining the advantages. It would give him an independent job for a while. Give him something to think about. Set his mind in order. It might even be a start toward a business of his own. She could prod up the Perkinses' interest in the scheme for a sufficient length of time. The woman was a fool anyway. . . .

What I didn't like about it was her effort to draw me into the affair. It seemed to me that Sigourney already had enough good angels fussing over his future. All at once she stopped, and the Louis XV drawing-room abruptly resumed its normal air of a fastidious repose. 'Perhaps it was a mistake,' she

said, reverting to her former thought 'Maybe I ought not to have done it.'

'You needn't worry yourself about that,' I told her. 'Whatever it was you said to Anne Martin, I'm quite sure it had no effect on her or her actions. Your real trouble, if you don't mind my saying so, is that you don't like to see something which you think you've started getting out of your hands.'

She did mind my saying so, quite evidently. For a moment she was exceedingly vexed indeed. And then she fell back on her sense of humor. 'How utterly absurd,' she smiled at me. 'Fancy my going on like —— And it's one of my strictest rules never to meddle. Well, there's no fool, you know, like the old one. . . .'

And there was something rather pathetic about that, too. 'The trouble is, I suppose,' she said, 'that I don't know *how*. One knows so little . . .' It had been one of her strictest rules. She had thought that it was enough to ensconce herself forever behind a humorous detachment. And then this vivid personal interest had presented itself and she had behaved like any one else. 'It's like being caught at something naughty when you're a child,' she said, to herself I believe. I didn't tell her what I thought. I told her that she had better drop all this romantic nonsense about a clay works on a deserted island. But I couldn't help treasuring the picture she had given me of Nina Bradstreet pumping up a foolish woman's enthusiasm for ceramics in an effort to save her young cousin's peace of mind. For she would have been capable of it.

It was, certainly, a gallant proposal. But in Jasper, and in Anne too, there was also a kind of gallantry.

They were not merely waiting about in attendance upon their psycho-physical reactions; they were seriously asking themselves upon what assumptions they should base their interpretation of life. It means that they were facing with courage what was essentially a moral difficulty, and it made them interesting. People who merely follow their emotions are not only dull, they are without æsthetic importance. But both Jasper and Anne maintained the gentlemanly, which is also the artistic, attitude. For a gentleman can only be explained by saying that he regards life as an art, with the conventions of an art; and if there are a great many arty people who seem to regard it only as an experiment in biology, perhaps that merely emphasizes the point. Neither Jasper nor Anne ever approached it as an experiment in biology. . . .

That, of course, made it no less difficult. They saw more and more of each other, but they did not seem to understand themselves any better for it. Once they even went on an all-day excursion to the town which had been her grandmother's home. They planned it out in a mood of jovial comradeship; and though Anne found, naturally, that the place was much changed and full of not very happy memories, they yet had a very good time. But coming back again in the train they both fell rather silent, and arriving finally at her apartment, after what had been a long day, the mood in some way seemed to have changed. . . .

He opened the door for her, and stood aside while she advanced into the deep obscurity of the room. She did not switch on the light; she did not even look back at him where he was standing with his hand upon the knob, but stopping suddenly in the middle

of the room she jerked off her felt hat and flung it down upon her gate-legged table. Actually flung it down, with a quick violence which, in her, was startling. It was a slight gesture, sensed rather than seen in the gloom, but it affected Sigourney like the abrupt crackling of a placid sheet of ice. It gave him the same sense of a sharp, dangerous giving under an unsuspected strain, and the idea that there could be any strain behind her quiet eyes arrested him with a disturbing shock. He stood there, his own hat in his hand, in the very act of bowing himself politely off. . . .

'Come in,' she said, with what sounded like a trace of impatience. 'Come in. What are you thinking of? Come in and sit down.'

But still she did not look at him. He saw that she had moved away across the room; he distinguished her in silhouette against the curtains of the window, illuminated from without by that perpetual glow in which the city at nighttime encloses itself. Her back was toward him. All at once he saw her put her hands up, fluffing her short hair, as if in an attempt at ease, or release.

'I'll get some supper,' she said, without moving from the window. 'There's probably something. . . .' Anne did not know herself what it was that she wished a release from. It was only that she had been impressed, in an abrupt wave, by the thought that she wished to be freed from something. Not the boy — or was it the boy? The trip, in some indefinable way, had turned out differently from her anticipations.

Two or three urchins were playing a skeletonized football game in the street, and she seemed to be

looking at it. It is needless to say, however, that she was infinitely more conscious of the solemn fragment of masculinity pervading the room behind her than she was of the urchins. The influence of his presence there seemed definite and tangible, even though her back was turned to him. It occurred to Anne to meditate upon the strength which men derive from their simplicity, which makes them so easily understandable, and yet so difficult, at times — like musical instruments with few stops.

There was a slight, hesitant movement in the room. 'Shall I turn on the light, then?'

'If you want to,' said Anne. The movement ceased. 'Do what you *like*,' she said, seeming to put some significance into her stress of the word, though what it was, Jasper did not know. 'Of course,' she said, 'if you want to go away — to abandon me now. . . .'

'Abandon you!' The charge was so outrageous that he stepped forward in protest. But it *was* outrageous, he thought. But he stopped. He was being idiotic; she was only teasing him.

'It's what everybody does, sooner or later,' she said, in a serious, rather a tired voice.

He was almost painfully uncertain of her mood. 'But I'm not abandoning you. . . .'

'No,' she said, lightly. But she did not turn around.

'To tell you the truth,' he said, revolving his hat in his hands, 'I suppose I did rather want to leave. But I don't now.'

'Why did you want to leave?'

'It wasn't because I wanted to desert you. It was because I thought the trip was — was over.'

The girl had dropped her hands upon the window-ledge; entirely still, she seemed to be studying the street with great care. 'Oh,' she said. Then: 'Why don't you want to go now?'

He did not know. He could not disentangle what seemed to him the great complexity of his motives. But he could not escape the insistence of her silence. 'Because you have asked me to stay,' he said, rather miserably.

'That's a poor reason.'

'Anne!' he burst out, 'you don't know your own power; you don't know the effect you have on people! We had a nice time to-day — at least I did — but it was over, wasn't it? What should I stay for? I want to hang on to the facts, it's not as easy as you seem to think. You wanted some one to keep you company to-day. I'd be glad enough to keep you company anywhere. Well, that much is all right. We had a good time; I know as well as you do that's all we had, so why shouldn't I just go home now and think about it?'

'But I didn't just want you because you were somebody to keep me company,' said Anne.

'I don't put myself in your class, Anne,' he said very simply and earnestly. 'So I guess I did want to leave. Things had been pretty nice, and I guess I didn't want them to get mixed up. But then ——'

'What?'

'When I saw you throw your hat down on the table it seemed to me something must be the matter. It broke it up. I couldn't go after that, if it was true. . . .'

'Do you mean the pedestal cracked a little?'

'The pedestal? What pedestal? . . . I mean, I

thought perhaps I had annoyed you, or tired you out. I wanted to know what it was.'

Anne gave a slight, irritated shrug. 'I don't like being on pedestals. It makes me feel unsafe. . . .'

It seemed to him they were wretchedly at cross-purposes. 'What are you treating me like this for?' he demanded. 'You know, Anne, I don't understand you. I don't pretend to. Why do you want to confuse me?'

She turned about abruptly. 'Yes,' she said, 'poor boy, I am just confusing you, aren't I?' To his astonishment he saw that she was frankly laughing — at him. The change was amazing. 'Let's have candles!' she exclaimed gayly. Their moods suddenly met again, after a queerly dangerous sort of suspension.

They bumped their heads together groping on the mantelpiece; she held the candlestick while he struck the match, and then as he lit the second candle from the flame, she drew the inner curtains. A companionable, friendly cosiness was at once established. But as she turned about from the window there was that in her large eyes, placid in the placid candlelight, which seemed to indicate how nearly they were trembling on the edge of something else. . . .

They were almost too cheerful. They boiled the coffee and tumbled chicken salad out of the icebox with a gaiety which was slightly excessive, faintly forced. They jumped up to get the salt-cellar or extra spoons or anything else which had been forgotten with a remarkable eagerness. They laughed almost uproariously over the old lady in the train who had snored, or over the waiter in the restaurant where they had taken lunch, or over the architecture of the

filling-station which now occupied what had been the front yard of her grandmother's house.

'You know,' said Anne, with a sudden seriousness, 'I think maybe it was that abominable filling-station. . . .' They had got the dishes cleared away by that time, and were sitting, the two of them, over the gate-legged table, so that for each the face of the other was framed between two tall, steadily-burning candles. 'The old drive went right through the place where that awful kiosk is . . . I can remember my father's coming up it in a taxicab the night he came to get me after my mother died.'

'Ghastly,' said the boy, 'it must have been,' with a quick, real sympathy.

'Maybe,' said Anne, seeing a very remote picture of herself as a little girl with the hair down her back, standing in a white nightgown within the somber recesses of a hallway; and feeling herself, as she saw it, to be extremely old. Extremely old, and a little lonely, until she met in his eyes the warm support of Jasper's unwavering devotion. She put her hand suddenly out across the table. 'My dear,' she said, 'maybe it was. But it taught me a good deal. Things I don't think you know. I sometimes wonder,' she said, probably realizing it to be a trifle theatrical as she said it, 'whether it may not be better not to know things like that.' And as he laid his hand in hers, he felt her fingers tighten upon his own, as if she were grasping and acknowledging an aid.

It did not seem theatrical to Jasper. It appeared to him that she had become immensely sad, and as though, like the lofty sorrow of an empress, it lifted her far above him; and he felt, I suppose, rather like a page-boy who had lent to such a one the momentary

support of a shoulder — graciously received but without meaning for so exalted an emotion. It was a physical contact, and it thrilled him; but it was not that which so suddenly carried him away.

'It taught me,' said Anne, 'how things come to you. It's not easy to put it into words . . .'

'I know what you mean,' said Jasper. 'The way they just happen to you without warning.'

The quickness of his understanding often comforted her, just as his obtuse simplicity as often amused or vexed her. 'And without importance,' she would have added, but he spoke first:

'Like my marriage.'

She slipped her hand away. He relinquished it as one to whom the withdrawal of an empress's momentary notice is no loss, since the memory of the moment will remain. It was with rather a mixture of feeling that Anne perceived the impersonal quality of his admiration. 'Tell me,' she said, almost hurriedly fixing her attention, not on Sigourney, but on that to her mysterious background of his life.

And he did tell her. Yes, he had certainly been carried away. The whole story, everything, poured out for her inspection and her verdict in the low, worried voice of his perplexity, with the candlelight on the furrows of his face, which was fixed not upon herself but upon the ash-tray standing on the polished maple table-top. He explained his hopes; he insisted upon his inexplicable failure. 'What is there to do now?' he asked her, as if a word from her could resolve spiritual difficulties which had not even an existence outside his own soul. 'I must do something about it. It's impossible for things to drag on in this way. It's unendurable.'

'Nothing ever seems to me *unendurable*,' said Anne, her eyes also falling to the ash-tray and to his browned, rather stubby, sinewy fingers, which were nervously flicking ash from a cigarette which had gone out. She wondered just a little what he meant by that word, whether any experience he had passed through could actually make such a claim. But she felt a certain distaste for the experience, whatever it had been. 'No woman,' said Anne, thinking of her sex not as colleagues but as rivals, 'could ever make your life unendurable. It's your life.'

'It ties one hand and foot,' he said, as if Anne Martin's influence could have any other effect upon that knot save to bind it somewhat tighter. 'It gives you no basis for anything — not even for decisions. A fellow can't live that way. You've got to *do* something. If it had been a clean break ——'

'Why don't you get a divorce?'

'How? There aren't any grounds. I might give them to her, but she doesn't want a divorce.'

'It oughtn't to be hard to arrange,' said Anne impersonally.

'That's no good,' said the boy. 'If she doesn't want it, it would be a rotten trick. I may have messed things all up, but I certainly can't improve them by being a blackguard. No, she doesn't want it, and that's that.'

'My dear,' said Anne, with a kind of gentle impatience. 'Those are only words you are using. It's not a question of calling yourself bad names. It's a question of your own soul.' Anne knew well enough what he meant, but that view of life simply made no impression upon her, because it was not her own. It was a part, she thought, of masculinity's abysmal

wrong-headedness, of its infinite capacity for absurdly mistaken values. And Jasper probably knew what she meant, too, but his admiration for her would not allow him to take the words in their intended significance.

'I suppose it is,' he said gloomily, 'and the soul doesn't seem to have functioned very well. If I couldn't give Elizabeth what she wanted, it must have been for some reason inside me, because I swore whatever happened I'd make a go of it. And then I didn't. I don't know what the trouble was, even, and that frightens me because it gives me nothing to work on. Why, I'd be afraid to divorce her now, just because it would mean that I was so much more of a scoundrel than I thought I could be. . . .'

Anne turned her face away, so that looking up he saw the really exquisite profile of her face and the fine, the simply beautiful, modeling of her throat. He did not know that she was trying, against something which amounted almost to repugnance, to form some definite image of his wife.

'She's playing a kind of waiting game with me,' he said miserably, 'and that hurts rather, because I never thought my wife would have to play a game of any kind with me.'

'Every sort of relationship,' said Anne, 'is a good deal of a game.'

'No,' said the boy.

Anne turned swiftly back upon him. Her large eyes looked very solemn, I suppose, there in the candlelight. 'Are you still in love with her, Jasper?'

'Since I have known you,' said Sigourney levelly, 'no.' He suddenly drove the cold butt of his cigarette into the ash-tray. 'Beside you, Anne,' he said, 'she is

less than *that*. But you are fineness itself. People like us — like myself or Elizabeth — have nothing to do with you at all.'

There was a little pause. And then Anne leaned forward and dropped her hand, as if she had darted it, upon his sleeve. 'Jasper,' she said, 'are you in love with me?'

In the very lightness of her touch there was something which reduced him to a complete immobility. So frail and so astonishing was the contact, as though the least motion or the least thought would dissolve it into a mere trick of the imagination. To have formulated an idea would have been an act as gross as Samson's destruction of the temple. And then he became aware of a great tide of emotion arising within him, so that his heart would burst with the effort of repression. He must not — he knew that he must not — let her withdraw that slight pressure of finger-tips. He must keep the moment suspended, nothing must be allowed to happen. . . . But Anne was looking at him, full at him. Slowly he nodded his head, once, because he could not help it, and the fingers vanished, as he knew they would. It had happened. There was a pause, an immense pause, a pause as long as ages.

He is so simple, Anne was saying over and over to herself, and so strong and so foolish. He is so simple. . . . And then: Why did I say that to him? she thought. Because I had to. She had averted her eyes; she was quite still. A very long time went by — perhaps five minutes. Jasper did not move.

'Jasper, my dear —' she began all at once. She had used those two last words a dozen times that evening. But this time they fell heavily into his mind, and then as if they had exploded there they overwhelmed him

with an outburst of feeling. He must keep it under. He turned his own face away. No further sound came from her. He looked up again to see that she had left the chair, had retreated from him into the farther part of the room, so that the light of the two candles coming in between made her indistinct, and so that her voice, when at length she spoke again, seemed to come out of a luminous haze.

Jasper, on the other hand, was perfectly plain to her; his face was illuminated as if for her dispassionate inspection, and it translated the turbulence within him into a look which could hardly have suggested much beside an absurd sort of surprise, like that of a stupid man into whose head you have suddenly introduced a new idea. Anne was not in a state of turbulence. Gazing back at that face she was again conscious of an oppression, as if she wished very much to have a weight of some kind lifted from her, or as if she were engaged upon a difficult enterprise which he ought to have sense enough to make easy for her. But not a state of turbulence. 'Jasper,' she said, 'it seems to me that you were not fair with your wife.'

'No,' he said, 'I must not have been. If somebody had told me, I would have done differently. But I'm not making excuses. It was my failure. I always seem to come to you after a failure. The war was one — my not being in it. This is another . . .'

'Don't talk in that way about yourself. Because it was not your fault. And there was nothing you could have done. No one could have told you. It was before you ever married her at all that you were unfair.'

'Before —— ?'

'You said to yourself that you were going to *make*

it a success. Can't you understand what that means? Don't you see that you never thought of her? It was almost an insult, Jasper. If you don't even expect the marriage to succeed on its own account, how can you go into it at all?'

And then, I suppose, he did at last understand what it was that he had done. He saw what she meant.

'You are sorry,' she said gently, 'because you failed. You've never once told me that you were sorry because you failed her.'

He had simply never thought of that — that way of looking at it — not once. And yet Jasper was not a stupid man. It was only that he had been so sure, so overwhelmingly sure, of the rectitude of his own logical intentions. He seemed almost dumbfounded by the force of that revelation.

'You mustn't think badly of yourself,' said Anne. 'It is only that you cannot do things that *way*.'

'I thought I was being generous,' he said slowly.

'Yes,' said Anne, indistinct and unreadable behind her luminous screen. 'But Jasper, my dear' — and I suppose that she thought she was being generous herself — 'believe me I am not saying this to make you — to make us — unhappy. There aren't any failures; there're only mistakes. We have to take what the world gives us, I think, what there is of beauty in it. Little enough perhaps. But not try to make it. You can't help what has happened. But neither can you let it — destroy you. You must look for what is coming.'

What was that phrase she had used? He had to grope for its significance through the confusion of this intolerable, luminous obscurity. She had said something... All at once he sprang out of his chair.

Above the level of the candle flame he met her glance, large, steady, glowing, unscreened from his view. 'Make *us* unhappy,' he said in a low, strained voice. 'Why do you say things like that to me, Anne? Do you imagine I have no feelings at all? You have just asked me if I was —— What do you want? Don't you know that I adore you? Everything about you, everything connected with you? That I would do anything . . .? What's the good of throwing it at me?'

She was not turbulent. No. Rather she felt a little leaden. She saw that passionate admiration in his face. That was what she wanted, she thought. She wanted it terribly. She wondered if she could live, without the security of that devotion. 'And I, my dear?' she said. 'What do you think I feel?'

There was an instant's dead pause, and then he crossed to her very rapidly. She had a strange sense of seeing him coming, ominous. She put up her hands, really almost as if to ward him off, but he seized them, caught them up against his own chest, looked right into her eyes. . . .

Was it something that he saw there? Who knows? He dropped her hands abruptly. He did not embrace her. 'It is my punishment, I suppose, this,' he said.

It was his wife, again, that he was thinking of. She stepped back, a little, with a sense of vexation. She must be some commonplace woman, Anne thought. Playing a waiting game. Could I endure that sort of claim upon me? Her eyes sank to the floor. His feet looked so absurd there, planted, with no vestige of their owner's emotion. 'It can't be a punishment,' she said, 'for *I* have done nothing wrong.'

'Anne,' she heard him saying, 'you are too good for

me. You are above me. And I could offer you nothing, not even marriage.'

And then, in her own mind, she faced the situation very calmly, with what seems to me more than a little courage. She could take him, she knew. She had only to raise a little finger, an eyelid.... They were alone there, quite alone. There are clean sheets, she thought absurdly, on my bed. She did not believe in marriage, she did not believe in entanglements. She believed in living one's own life and taking what the world offered, for it was so very little. 'It is not that, my dear,' she replied. 'How could you say it? It is whether it would be right or not.'

He half turned away. 'Of course,' he said.

'Or whether it would be ugly,' she said. No entanglements. In this way it would not be right to herself. 'Where would we go?' she said. 'We cannot fly to Africa.'

'No,' said Jasper, suddenly dashing his fists together and then dropping his arms to his sides. 'What can I say, Anne? How can I urge you? I should urge the other thing. You are worlds beyond me; I am nothing, not with all this on my back ——'

Anne had said that she did not like pedestals. But how could she live, she wondered, without this devotion? There is security in pedestals, remoteness from the crowd as from the individual worshiper, a freedom from entanglements of the soul — if one can stay on them. But if one cannot? Anne never distrusted herself, but she distrusted life. It would not be fair to herself; it would not be fair to him. If he failed her — it would not then be fair to him.

'It would be wrong,' said Jasper dully. 'I guess this is my expiation.'

'It would be ugly,' said Anne, 'as long as you think as you are thinking now.'

'It is impossible,' said Jasper.

'Darling,' said Anne, laying her hand lightly upon his shoulder, 'it is impossible — now.'

And so each felt that they understood the other perfectly; while in fact it was, I imagine, as perfect a misunderstanding as it would be easy to encounter. He took her hand from his shoulder, just touching his lips to it, and was gone. Empty, going along the empty street, as though she had led him up the staircase of some great tower, up and up and up to the very verge of its summit, and then had sat down abruptly upon the next to the top step. But he knew now whether or not he was in love with her. 'Anne,' he exclaimed suddenly to the Washington Arch, 'if you could ever do any one an injury, it would be an injury you've done me. An injury, injurious. . . .' How silly he was, he thought. But he went on repeating it in his thought: an injury, injurious. . . .

And Anne? She sat down abruptly in the chair he had just vacated. He is so simple, she thought, and so strong; and she felt enormously tired, and irritably vexed with herself.

IX

Raising her eyes a trifle fearfully from her chicken patty, Nina perceived that her party after all gave every promise of being a success. Or, as she phrased it to herself, of being endurable. She had had the most damaging misgivings. All those people, she had reflected, who probably don't know each other. But then, no one ever knows any one else at that kind of party in New York. All those men, she had thought, who would bring flasks. The idea of a flask still offended Nina's sense of the fastidious. But apparently they had not brought flasks — too many of them, that is. The chicken patty at least was competent; the dance music had not seemed unbearable. . . .

It was a supper dance at one of the big hotels. Perhaps you know the room. Spaciously discreet, polite, and decorated with that peculiar approach to a subdued insanity which lends to so many hotel interiors their subtle psychological fitness. They are like nothing on earth. It has an admirable effect; to begin with, you are pleased to escape from reality into their heterogeneous illusion, while later on when it is time to go home you are equally glad to escape out of them into any kind of reality you can find. I suppose it must be the perfection of hospitality to bore your guests, slightly, by way of conclusion, so that they will be as glad to leave as they have been to come. 'There's genius in it,' said Nina. 'Its only unfortunate consequence is its effect on the

waiters. Yes, that must account for it — for the inescapable sadness of our waiters and bell-boys. To embrace as a profession the daily contemplation of lunacy ——'

'But bell-boys,' said the man on her left, 'have no souls. I believe it is established by Saint Augustine. And waiters are civilized products, which means that they can stand anything.'

The man on her left was Hogarth Stubbs. Nina had only a sketchy notion of how he had got there. It was hardly like her, she thought, to be entertaining writers of farce-comedy at a supper dance. But then, it had been a long time since she had entertained anybody at a supper dance. Her genius was all for the small scale, for afternoon teas, where one can be much more effectively ironic, personal, in one's delicately humorous way, and where one can control the lighting system. Nina did not know how she had come to be giving Jasper a supper dance. It had somehow seemed to grow up around her, like a distasteful fate. She did not even know who had suggested the wretched business to begin with. It might as well as not have been her husband; Billy Bradstreet having a marked fondness for dancing, in a slightly stiff-jointed way, with charming young women. She did not even know at what precise period it had altered from being a vague project which one need not worry about into being a scheduled event which one could not evade. But she had only shrugged her pretty shoulders, because you can't struggle against fate. And now here it was; and she felt that it had culminated in getting all the most unsuitable sorts of people together when her only instinct would have been to keep them apart, and at the most unsuitable mo-

ment imaginable. A mess. But it appeared to be turning out a success.

Her husband, at a remote distance down the avenue of glassware and floral effects, seemed to be acquiring a gratifying sprightliness from an ambiguous young woman with a pretty face who was called Mrs. Porter. 'It gives him so much more animation,' she remarked thoughtfully, 'than golf.' The girl on her husband's other side seemed to be neither giving nor receiving animation of any kind. It was in a moment of defiant vexation that Nina had finally placed Miss Martin in the seat of honor upon the host's right. 'But how in the world am I to arrange it?' she had demanded, confronted by the list of names. It was a most extraordinary crowd they had managed, between them all, to get together. The Morgan creature, whom Nina detested on sight — Jasper had insisted upon him. A sharp-faced, unpleasantly energetic young woman named Taylor, who now seemed engaged in the rather curious occupation of attracting Stubbs' attention from across the table in order immediately to snub him. A singer who had neglected to tell her that he was a bond salesman, and an insurance agent who had neglected to tell her that he was a poet. Other people. I was there myself.

Nina perceived that the music had begun once more.

'I never golf myself,' Stubbs was remarking, a trifle portentously, 'except of course professionally. It's like joining the Masons, it helps you in your business.'

She decided that she didn't mind this Stubbs. Though I later heard her ask: 'To write farce-comedies do you really have to be one yourself?' with her air of an ingenuous desire for information.

The insidious melancholy of the music was slowly rising in the place — k-*throb*, k-throb, k-*throb*, k-throb — as if one had started a discreet and melodious pump which was filling the room with sound like a tank with water: filling it with waves of sound and movement, a rising ride, washing the people away from the tables. K-throb, k-throb. 'I don't *like* it,' said Nina suddenly, with infinite precision, 'it destroys my peace of mind.' In the lulling of the conversations Sue Porter's voice was suddenly audible with the final words of an anecdote, and there was laughter from the host's end of the table — almost a burst of it, if anything in that modulated room could be called an outburst. Stubbs' voice came out around the laughter. '—— haven't any peace of mind. Out of fashion nowadays.'

'It's disgraceful of Billy to laugh that way,' said Nina. 'Bad taste. *Can* civilized products stand anything?'

'Eh?' said Stubbs. 'Oh ——'

'It's not the question,' the Taylor girl suddenly and rudely shot out from her side. 'The question is whether we can stand the civilized products.'

'You being one of 'em,' said Stubbs cheerfully. 'May I have the dance?' Jasper, sitting between, had made, just after Stubbs, inarticulate noises to convey the same request. Grace Taylor nodded with the air of pouncing upon him. Hogarth sighed and went off with the girl on his right. Nina surveyed a devastated table, emptied save for the awkward figure of the Morgan creature near the other end, slouched in his chair, with his shirt-front bulging up. But he didn't look so badly, she thought, in evening clothes. There is some kind of distinction in the man,

she thought, which must be the reason why I detest him. And really, Casimir did not look badly. That air of shagginess seemed inseparable from him; but dressed in a dinner coat, adequately cut and pressed, it gave him a certain dignity. When he was wearing tweeds you thought it was a result of the tweeds; when he was wearing evening clothes you perceived that it was something more profound, an aspect of the man's moral, rather than of his physical, nature.

He got up at great length and came slowly toward her, pushing the empty chairs out of his way, until finally he let himself down in Jasper's seat. 'Charming party, Mrs. Bradstreet,' he said, and Nina acknowledged the awkward compliment against a kind of repugnance which she perceived with surprise to have a queer approach to admiration in it. 'Well,' he said, putting out one hand, with a freshly lit cigarette between the forefingers, over the edge of a plate, 'is your cousin going into the Mackerel Ledge clay proposition? I should hope so. Darned good thing.'

The abruptness of it very nearly rendered her speechless. She had no idea the man knew anything about the Mackerel Ledge clay enterprise. Speech, as a matter of fact, was abruptly interdicted to her by what seemed a whole flock of waiters suddenly thrusting their arms down between them to remove the fragments of the entrée. A ridiculous confusion. 'Why, what on earth,' she demanded, feeling excessively absurd to find herself addressing the ruins of a chicken patty as it was carried past her nose, 'have you heard about Mackerel Ledge, Mr. Morgan?'

'Oh,' said Morgan unexpectedly, 'I'm engaged on it myself, you know, in a business way. Fact is, Mrs.

Perkins has consulted me about taking on Jasper. She likes your idea — she says she has confidence in young men. You see,' he explained, 'I'm handling all the publicity for her.'

He was careful to call it her idea, Nina said explaining it to me a little later. '*My* idea! It made me feel chilly. Or is it really chilly in this room . . . ?'

To Morgan she said, 'Oh;' and then, 'Of course it's not any affair of mine. I was unaware that you ——'

'Surely,' said Morgan, 'I know.' He made her feel as though she had made an odiously damaging admission of some kind or other. 'Naturally, I suppose I'm an interested party, but it really would be a good thing for the boy. I want him to come in with us.'

'To come in with *you?*' she said, in a tone of dismay.

Over his shoulder she saw Jasper's back appearing upon the edge of the crowd, swaying a moment, with the Taylor woman's face beyond, firing something at him as if she were trying to sell him on batiks. The melancholy effect of that waving crowd of figures, half in colors, half in black and white, struggling like the nations for self-determination in an insane world, affected her very adversely. . . .

Within the crowd at the same moment Mrs. Sue Porter, quite absent-mindedly, was squeezing Mr. Bradstreet's left hand with a warm, affectionate pressure. . . . 'Jazz,' the bond salesman singer was saying to Anne Martin, 'has lost everything except its belief in the rhythm of facts.' 'Has it?' said Anne. 'Compare this to Alexander's Rag-Time Band,' said the singer, as a neighboring couple caromed into them. 'Smooth and sad. Yes, jazz has lost all its

exuberance, like — like our office furniture. A similar approach to perfection which is necessarily melancholy.' He talked on, to the steady flow of the fox trot. 'Do you know what is the matter with Wall Street? It is too perfect. Sometimes I sigh for a roll-top desk, or one, just one, old-fashioned spittoon. But Wall Street is not bad art; it is oppressively great art, like this. For reality is rhythm, nothing else. When you know that you are overwhelmed by the awful sadness of the fact. The perfect rhythm of filing-cases. It is the trouble with our generation.'. . . 'But why,' the insurance agent poet was demanding of his partner, 'does the woman want to wear a magenta rose on that dress?' 'Awful, isn't it?' said his partner. 'Are you coming out to Goose Point next week?'. . . What Grace Taylor had been firing at Jasper was simply the remark that Anne was looking awfully well to-night. 'Is she?' said Sigourney. 'Oh, yes, to be sure.'

'I envy that woman sometimes,' said Grace sharply. 'Gets what she wants. Always will. Not that she deserves it.' He didn't hear her. Anne, to him, could not look either well or ill. She is, he was saying to himself, the most beautiful woman in the world; there was never any one like her; she is the thing itself, and all the rest of these woman creatures are only foolish approximations. They passed close to the bond salesman and his partner. Anne, her head a little back, her face raised, was giving to his theory of office furniture the full sunlight of her grave amusement. The poise of her head — caught back just so far — was grace in the absolute, lovely. She seemed to float, in the medium of that throbbing rhythm, upon her own loveliness. She did not even see Jasper at all. She

looks, he thought, as though she had never known of my existence.

Jasper Sigourney had passed several pretty ragged weeks since that night when he had spoken to the Washington Arch. Is it necessary to describe them? For a logician, certainly, there was little enough of comfort in his situation. 'Why,' he asked himself, 'does she behave this way?' To his mind, the thing was over, done. You don't continue after conversations of that sort. You go off and have emotions and never see each other any more. You attend to your business. You feel solemn, and make it a point of honor to efface yourself from her life. But Anne did continue — not that particular conversation, but their other and more ordinary ones. Anne did not seem to feel solemn. It was as if nothing had happened; and he knew that everything had happened. 'But she knows,' he said, 'that I cannot marry her. But she is in love with me,' he said. 'How is it possible?' It wasn't possible, but yet that was what she had said. If she wasn't trying to say that, he thought, her words had no meaning at all.

The rhythm, the movement, passed through him, working up to its discreet, its infinitely discreet climax, making waves in his mind. 'If she is in love with me, why does she still want to see me? Why doesn't it hurt her as much as it hurts me?' Jasper did not know the answer to those questions.... The music trailed its final note and came, full stop, to its perfectly polite conclusion. 'There,' it seemed to say, in a tone of the most perfect gentility, 'there is my broken heart. The broken heart of this melancholy world. Certainly not, madame, one need say no more about it.' Jasper's eyes followed Anne

and her partner, going off to the table. She had slipped her arm through the arm of the bond salesman. Jasper found himself, on a rapidly thinning floor, confronting Grace Taylor. 'Eh,' he said suddenly, 'Anne seems awfully keen about this batik business of yours.'

'What?' said the business woman sharply, as if he had startled her. 'Oh, yes. Yes, I suppose she does. Can't help that . . .'

'You can't help it . . .?'

'Nothing,' said Grace. 'What are you waiting for? And what did you say that for?'

If Jasper had been thinking about the Taylor girl at all it might have occurred to him that she was almost nervous. But of course he was not thinking about the Taylor girl. 'She told me the other day,' he said, 'that she feels her responsibility to you. She'd work herself to death in that store if she thought her obligation demanded it. You mustn't trade on her, you know.'

'She has a head on her shoulders!' snapped Grace. 'She knows what she's doing.' The asperity rather took him aback. 'She's got a responsibility, all right — to herself.'

'What?'

But they had already reached the table.

Nina saw them all coming back, washing back off the dancing floor like a tide, until it looked like a sandbar at low water. Jasper and Grace coming back on one side: Stubbs and his partner coming back on the other. 'No, I'm not a civilized product,' the Taylor girl shot out at Stubbs, picking up the conversation precisely where it had been dropped and showing that she must have been thinking about it

ever since. 'No woman's a civilized product.' Nina at first did not know what she was talking about. But Hogarth seemed to. 'Just as no man's a sensible one,' the Taylor girl finished incisively.

Hogarth smiled. 'Are you going to give me the next dance then?' he asked imperturbably. 'I want to talk to you, you know.' The girl turned her back on him.

'I'm not sure,' said Nina, 'that I'm particularly amused by civilization — not by this one.'

The next course. Plates, mastication, the wavering hum of conversation. 'As if,' I said to the girl on my left, 'the tank had attracted the mosquitoes, now that the water is drawn off.' 'Were you calling me a mosquito?' said the girl. One should not make remarks like that to the girl on one's left at supper dances. Food, gathering heat, the recommencement of the pump, pumping up the flood. K-*throb*, k-throb, k-*throb*, k-throb, o-whee — ee ——. 'Jazz,' began the artist from Wall Street, but somebody carried him off; he was washed into the flood. Jasper this time was dancing with Anne Martin. The sunlight was upon himself now. The ambiguous sunlight of that grave amusement. Jasper was immensely happy.

Anne was immensely curious, about herself, and about the man who had one arm around her. She leaned slightly closer upon his breast, and felt a convulsive tightening, to which she liked to surrender herself — liked to surrender . . . She slipped a little freer from him. Did he understand her? Would he ever understand her? She had insisted to him upon her responsibilities in the batik business and he had seemed to think that she was making a moral issue of it. But he was always making moral issues out of

things. Did he really recoil from her because he thought it would be immoral? Or imagine that she recoiled on that account? Was he as childishly trammeled as that? But Anne did not know much about morality. Perhaps what she had said about the batik business was morality. He admired her for it. So it must have been admirable. Yes, she thought that she had been, in simple fact, admirable. And he danced well. Gracefully, with a pleasant sensitiveness to her mood. . . . Jasper was simply happy.

All over the room people were saying things to each other, in low tones, their lips barely moving, as if the life within them were too precious, or too thin, to be allowed more than a guarded passage. 'I just adore this,' one was saying, 'and don't they keep just divine time?' 'Well,' another was saying, 'I cleaned up anyhow. What'd you want to let Smithers switch you into Consolidated Bottle-Tops for? I told you ——' 'You've got to quit carrying on with that Heinbaum guy,' said another. 'Oh, I think Otis Skinner is a *dear*,' said another. 'As I see it, it's all a question of tempo, this being happy business,' said another. '*He* said I looked too sweet to kiss,' said another. 'The Christian Scientists ——' said another. 'A. S. M. Hutchinson ——' said another. 'I'd like to kill you, you unspeakable beast!' said another. All these words, being spoken together, rolled themselves up with the throbbing of the pump into one volume of sound which, of course, had no meaning whatever. No meaning at all. Jasper was immensely and foolishly happy. But this, Anne Martin was thinking, is absurd. We cannot go on like this.

'Are you going away to that place at Mackerel Ledge, Jasper?' she asked him all at once. 'It

sounds — it sounds beautifully away from the world. From all this sort of thing. . . . You know, I would like you to go to Mackerel Ledge, I think, if you could take me with you.'

Why did she say things like that? Jasper fell out of his happiness into the tangle of his emotional life with an almost physical sense of shock. 'That's why I'm not going,' he said, feeling as though he would drop his arms from her right there in the middle of the floor, from the sheer volitional exhaustion which she could produce in him by saying things of that sort. 'Because I can't. Because I can't — take you with me. . . .'

'Won't you dance?' said Billy Bradstreet politely to his wife.

'Don't be ridiculous, Billy,' she said, and watched him go off once more with Sue Porter. 'I don't know,' said Nina with a delicate iteration, meditating upon her husband disappearing into the throng with Sue Porter, 'that I *am* particularly amused by civilization.'

'It's the only one we have,' I said.

'Look at them!' Nina exclaimed. 'All moving together to that unspeakably clever music. You wonder how soon the puppet master will put his hand down. Yes, it impresses me, too. I want to get up and shuffle around as much as the rest of them. It makes my head shuffle. I don't like it. It robs one of one's self-respect.'

'No,' I told her, 'it enlists one in the cause.'

'What cause?'

'Good heavens, how am I to tell you? They don't know themselves. That's what makes them so desperately interesting.'

The room was shot through with color, with in-

sistent sound, with that infinitely restrained, woven movement, with that soft, secretive, insidious shuffling of the ordered feet, like the shuffling of our emotions and ambitions and our thoughts.

'That,' said Nina, 'is what makes them so desperately dull. Like that clever music. They drink too many cocktails. They have too many sexual aberrations. They read too many clever books they don't understand. They have too few morals. Morals are exciting. They are dull.'

'Dull — yes!' exclaimed the artist from Wall Street with a finely emphatic gesture. 'But heroic. Positively heroic!' The orchestra wound up and down; the figures passed and repassed. 'Now Jack's having an idea,' said the girl who had stood up with him. 'He makes as much fuss about having an idea as if he were having a baby.' And she sat down again with what was intended to be a comic resignation. But the bond salesman waved his hand toward the music. 'Well, just listen to that,' he said. 'Never misses once, never lets up, never flinches from the rhythm of reality. An age that can produce that music has to be made of iron. Why, it's magnificent!' He thought it so magnificent that he had to make another gesture, which unfortunately sacrificed a water tumbler. . . .

Beyond, in the crowd, Grace Taylor was looking up furiously at her partner. 'You must, you must, you must, you know,' Hogarth Stubbs was saying to her with a steady imperturbability. 'You must ——' 'I want,' said Grace suddenly between her teeth, 'to swear. Like my father used to do. God damn, God damn, like that ——' Hogarth smiled. . . .

'But the immorality,' said Nina. 'I have no objection whatever to immorality, except that it isn't in-

teresting. There was some liveliness about an age when you had a sporting chance of heaven. There was a fascination about hell. Even as late as Hardy. Tess got hung. But,' said Nina sadly, 'none of you will ever get hung.'

I told her that she was being romantic. The bond salesman told her that she was wrong. 'It's not that we're immoral,' he said, 'it's just the other way around. We've abolished hell simply because we're too decent to conceive of any such incredible beastliness. Because we're no longer bad enough ourselves to believe in anything so outrageously and wickedly unjust as hell.'

'It's a point of view, I admit,' said Nina. . . .

On the dancing-floor, Sue Porter was regarding Billy Bradstreet with seraphically serious eyes. 'No,' she was saying, 'I didn't like Denver when I was there. They're too fast for me. I don't think that sort of thing is really quite *nice*, do you?'. . .

'We violate the Eighteenth Amendment,' said the bond salesman, 'because in any decent universe the Eighteenth Amendment would be violated. We give vent to our passions because we can't imagine life to be so immoral as to provide us with passions and then damn us eternally if we act on 'em. Especially when it drives us insane if we suppress them. . . .'

On the floor, Grace said 'God damn!' again. K-throb, k-throb, k-throb, k-throb, o-whee — ee. . . .

'We do what seems best to us,' said the bond salesman, 'because we not only entertain a belief in the moral order, we really work at it.' 'Oh, for heaven's sake, come on, Jack,' said his partner. . . .

'What a disagreeable young man,' said Nina. 'Does he ever sell any bonds?'

'But I guess he's right, all the same,' said Casimir Morgan, suddenly emerging somehow from the background of lights and colors and silks and rhythms. 'I don't know what my grandfather thought about life, but I'm blamed sure he never paid it the compliment of thinking there was anything moral in it. He had his morality made up out of the Bible for him, and he let it rest there. He knew if he ran off with his neighbor's wife he'd be damned, and if he didn't he wouldn't and that was that.'

'But these children,' said Nina, 'imagine that they can base their ethics on facts rather than on revelation.'

'Sure,' said Morgan, 'only there isn't any ethics in facts. The facts'll always do you in one way or another.' And everybody found themselves paying attention to Morgan, because really there was a kind of distinction about the man when he said such things. 'That boy says we don't believe in hell because it's too beastly. That's all right; the only trouble is that things are beastly. So you might just as easily believe in hell as not.'. . .

'It's frightfully warm,' Anne, at the same moment, was saying to Jasper. 'Can't we get a breath of air?' They could get a breath of air, by the doorway, though that was no escape from the discreet pulsations, the movements, the spiritual heats. 'Jasper,' said Anne very suddenly, 'I hate all this — sometimes. *Could* you take me with you to that island place, or whatever it is?'

'Anne! You don't know what you are saying!'

She shrugged her shoulders. 'Will you believe me that I do know what I'm saying?' . . .

Elsewhere within the room, standing apart from

the dancers, but with the saxophones in their ears, Hogarth and Grace were facing each other. 'God damn!' said Grace all at once in a tone very different from that which she had used before. And she gave him an extraordinary, twisted smile. And Hogarth, once more, smiled in return. . . .

'Do you believe in hell?' Nina was demanding with interest of Casimir Morgan.

'I don't believe in anything,' said Cass. 'I'll admit that I'm afraid of the whole show and shooting match, so I stay out of it.'

'The white flag,' said I, declamatorily. 'Surrender. The current generation doesn't know what it's fighting for, but at least it hasn't surrendered, which makes it a lot more engaging than Cass is. Morals,' said I, 'are purely human; there weren't any until we invented them. It follows that every time a man does a moral action he is accomplishing an achievement; and every time he doesn't he's just being natural. You can't blame him for that, but he doesn't deserve any credit. . . .'

'I don't want any credit,' said Morgan.

Coffee, more dancing, more dancing, rhythm, ordered, discreet insanity. The Taylor girl and the writer of farce comedies had disappeared somewhere. 'This sort of thing,' said Nina to me, 'is all perfectly weird, of course, but one does have a sense of *pattern* in it. . . . Or is it only a sense of foreboding? Jazz ——' said Nina, and then breaking off she repeated to me what Casimir had told her of his own connection with this china clay scheme. 'It seems an extraordinary coincidence,' said Nina. 'I hadn't the least idea that he had ever heard of the Perkinses. I didn't like it.'

'Nonsense,' said I.

'But Jasper has just come to me,' said Nina, 'to tell me that he had been thinking about it and that he might after all take the job.'

'The devil he did,' I exclaimed.

'Yes. Though why he should want to talk about that in the middle of a supper dance. . . . Somehow, I don't trust that Morgan creature. I dislike him. But I can understand his having an influence over people — if he tried. There is something . . .' Yes, there was something. I was willing to admit it. Though I was surprised, a little, that a woman should have felt it. Nina said that any woman, she thought, might feel it. . . .

Time passed. The pump filled and emptied, filled and emptied the room, with its quite illusory suggestion of variation in monotony, of freedom in syncopation. People talked, danced, smoked cigarettes, and it meant nothing, nothing whatever. Stubbs and Grace Taylor had never come back at all; it seemed possible that they were not coming back. Nina said that there was a pattern in it. What did she mean? Or was it all pattern and nothing else?

From a distance I became conscious of Nina once more in conversation with Morgan, and I wondered if they were still talking about morality. Casimir was very slouched, Nina very prim. No, it didn't seem to be about morality — it seemed to be something more interesting than that. Morgan wandered off to speak to Billy Bradstreet. Sue Porter had already floated away homeward. People were beginning to go. I approached my hostess. 'Why, good Heavens,' I said, 'what's happened to you?'

'Do you know what he's just been telling me?'

'Who? Morgan? No.'

She seemed to be the prey of some extraordinary vexation. 'It's impossible!' she exclaimed, her little eyes manifesting an extreme, agitated brilliance. 'It's too fantastic. He says that the Perkins woman wants a secretary on the ground at Mackerel Ledge, and that he had particularly recommended Anne Martin to her. He says her experience with that pottery business of hers would make her valuable —— But it's too fantastic.'

I own that I was rather surprised. 'It's absurd,' I said. 'She'd never go out there, of course.'

'How do you know she won't?' said Nina, in a genuine distress. 'He says that he has been talking to her about it to-night. And hasn't Jasper just told me that he thought he would change his mind and accept the job?'

That brought me up pretty short. I gazed at Nina. 'It's so *silly*,' she exclaimed, almost ready to cry from vexation. 'Why did he want to do that? He's like a beastly god from the machine, that creature. It's — it's *fierce*.'

'Hold on,' I said. 'Jasper may not even have heard about all this as yet. Let alone the girl's being willing. . . .' The saxophones drooped and died, coming to an end at last, like the end of a civilization. The diminished tide ebbed from the floor, on its way to say good-night, on its way to the cloak-room. The room was really quite empty.

'But,' she demanded, 'where are they?'

By this time one could survey the whole place. Anne and Jasper had indeed vanished.

Well. Nina, as the fact became evident, was overtaken by something very near to a panic. 'They

have gone off together . . .' she said. And then very abruptly: 'They've got to be stopped. Somebody must stop them!' She absolutely lost her head, which in Nina was so surprising a performance that I suppose I must have lost my own as well.

'But wait a minute,' I tried to say, 'don't be ridiculous.'

'Quick,' she said, 'get a taxi. Tell Billy to get a taxi.' 'Yes,' she said to the insurance agent, 'I'm so glad you came.' To see Nina smoothly telling guests that she was so glad they had come when she had quite lost her head was really remarkable. 'What are you thinking of?' I said. 'You're not going after them?'

'Yes,' said Nina . . . 'Good-bye. It was so good of you. . . .'

I had the sense of a great deal happening with extraordinary rapidity. What was left of her party simply disappeared. 'Is the taxi there?' A taxi was there; and there also were Billy and myself actually climbing in after her as if we were going to a fire. It was a sufficiently amazing rescue party, I suppose. But before I had really had time to think twice we were racing down Fifth Avenue. . . . Yes, it was an astonishing business. I must say that Billy, on his side of the cab, seemed to be pretty comfortable about it. But there was Nina between us, sitting bolt upright and contained, and absolutely blazing in the light of the passing street lamps, apparently possessed by the idea that she must reach the girl's apartment. 'That idiot boy,' she was exclaiming. 'It's such a *stupid* thing to do. It's so — it's so grotesque. He can't do that!' And Billy was being philosophical: 'Well, my dear, I don't know what it's all about, but

whatever it is, it's probably all your own fault anyway.' And I was trying to recover my sense of fact.

'The imbecile!' said Nina, and I actually felt her trembling with rage. We were passing Fourteenth Street. Whether it was Jasper or Anne or Morgan or only herself with whom she was angry I don't know. 'The imbecile.'

And then all at once we came to a dead stop, held up by the traffic lights in the midst of that ridiculous performance. Nina suddenly sank back against the cushion. I still felt her tremble. But it hardly seemed to be with rage. I looked at her. She was trembling with laughter.

'Rap on the glass, one of you,' she said weakly, 'and tell him to go home. Do you know what's happened to me? I'm simply overcome by my own utter idiocy.'

And she was. Her amusement, her universal amusement, had come abruptly to her assistance. She was really helpless with mirth. And, I suppose, it *was* all rather funny — when you stop to think of it.

X

Not that there could have been anything very amusing about it for the principal actors. When Anne, stepping off the floor at the end of one of the numbers, had first become conscious of some one at her elbow wishing to speak to her, it was with the immediate, disagreeable sense that she was being touched by the finger of a significant fate. Not as if something had already happened, but as if something were about to happen.

'Excuse me, please.' It appeared that one of the waiters had come to life — an event unusual enough in any case, perhaps, to suggest fate. 'She asked me to give it to you, the lady, at the end of the dance.' He was holding out toward her a folded slip of paper.

'To me?' said Anne, oddly conscious of the way in which the man simply by addressing her had at once become a human being. He had an interesting face, she thought.

'She showed you to me,' he said. 'She said I should give it you.'

Anne took the paper. Her name was across the face of it in Grace Taylor's handwriting. 'But where is she?'

'She has gone,' said the waiter, making the statement sound, in his somewhat clipped English, extraordinarily definite and final. 'Just now.' Anne saw that her partner was looking at her. She mastered the impulse to postpone this fate, whatever it might be. The paper said: 'When you leave, come to the shop. I *must* see you to-night. I'll wait till you come.'

She crumpled it in her hand and went on to the table, where the dessert course had just been laid. Jasper saw her.

'Has anything happened?' he said, with that quickness of solicitude which she liked so well. 'No,' said Anne deliberately, 'nothing has happened,' and she veiled whatever emotion her face might be showing under her light and dazzling smile. And later on she danced with him, but she said nothing about the message; then she danced with Casimir Morgan, and afterward with one or two others, and still she allowed Grace's note to lie crumpled up in her mind. The rhythmic beating of the music had entered into her spirit as well. She allowed herself, her feet, her legs, her body, to drift and swing in that low-voiced, shuffling current; and she thought that after all life, if it ever 'is' anything, is movement, pulsating movement like that, and that when events seemed to be moving one on toward a rapid the point was neither to check not to paddle ahead but, perhaps, to steer. To be, as an Englishwoman had told her once in Paris, 'damned well jolly sure it's what you want.' To steer. Anne never doubted her own control of the helm, but neither did she ever doubt the irresistible force of the current. And so she danced with first one person and then another, and it was not until an hour or so had gone by that she found herself once more with Jasper Sigourney, his fine and slightly diffident eyes looking down upon her with their warm admiration, and the ends of his sinewy fingers lying lightly against her back, their touch vivid through the thin stuff of her gown as though for all their lightness they would never let her go.

And so she said, quite without warning: 'Jasper, I

want you to take me over to the shop. Grace is there now, and she says that she has to see me.'

'The shop? You mean right now?'

'Yes. Right now. We needn't say anything to your cousin. We can come back again before the party breaks up.'

'But I don't understand. What's Grace doing in the —— ?'

'I don't know,' she interrupted him. 'I suppose we'll find out.'

They dropped at once out of the crowd. The bright solitude of the cloak-room struck her with its empty silence. But even here, after a moment, the throbbing sound of the music penetrated, far-away but insistent. She thought, as she gave a quarter to the attendant, of Jasper waiting out there for her, merely because she had expressed a wish, with that curious obedience of his. So unlike anything in ordinary experience, which is never obedient. But she did not keep him waiting. They passed out through the resplendent doorway of the hotel; the music, in a momentary crescendo, seemed to follow them, and the pulsating refrain of the fox-trot clung in her mind, in both their minds, perhaps, as the cab carried them swiftly away through the gigantic streets. . . .

Grace had every light in the little place going, in what was a kind of tempest of illumination. She had even (because the lighting was intentionally unobtrusive) knocked the shades off a couple of wall brackets near the little painted table which served as a cash desk. She was seated behind it, looking up as they entered, with a lot of papers in front of her and a pencil in her hand. Grace had already changed her evening gown for a tailored suit; she had pulled the

felt hat down upon her head with what must have been a single vicious jerk, and because it was slightly crooked it lent to her always incisive face an expression bordering surprisingly upon the ferocious.

'Oh,' she greeted them in a very hard and business-like way. 'So you brought him along. Well, I thought you might. Never mind.' She stopped.

The silence seemed a trifle strained. 'But what is it?' said Anne at length.

For a moment a doubtful look crossed the business-woman's face. 'I'm sorry to have jerked you out of the middle of the party this way,' she said with a hurried negligence, 'but you see, I'm going out of town to-morrow. I may be away some time. And I thought perhaps it would be better to talk this over with you before I left.'

Grace appeared to be curiously unsure of her tactics. 'Is there anything to talk over with me?' said Anne.

'Why, the fact is, my dear,' said Grace, with an added accent of casualness, 'I've decided to pull out. Quit the business, I mean.' There was rather a dead pause. Grace shuffled the papers on the table in front of her. 'I know you'll understand my point of view when I explain,' she said. 'Of course, I ought to have gone into the whole thing with you properly some other time, or written a letter or something. But I don't like letters. And honestly, I can't wait. I'm really on my way now, you see.'

Anne sat down in one of their cretonne-covered wicker chairs, and let her cloak slide slowly from her shoulders, her large eyes fastened upon her partner's. The business woman did not turn away, but she suddenly frowned and put the tip of her pencil between

her teeth. 'Naturally,' she said, 'I would have told you all about this sooner — if I'd known myself. But as a matter of fact I didn't. Not until this evening. So it just can't be helped. Naturally ——'

'Are you running away with Hogarth Stubbs?' asked Anne suddenly, and to Jasper's utter amazement.

Grace seemed to come to a defiant full-stop. 'Yes,' she said, 'I am.'

'I thought you might be,' said Anne simply, and a profound silence reigned in the midst of the batiks and the Italian peasant pottery. It was a silence so complete that Jasper was not certain that he had heard correctly.

'But see here, wait a minute,' he abruptly stuttered out, 'd'you mean you are going to get married . . .?'

'Yes, I am,' Grace repeated coldly, without looking toward him, 'just that. . . . And what about it?'

'Nothing,' said Anne. 'If it is what you want, Grace, I'm glad, of course.' There was another pause. 'But surely you didn't bring us down here in this way just to announce ——?'

'The wedding? No. That won't happen until tomorrow anyway. But here's the business that has to be settled.'

'You want me to attend to it while you are away?'

'Yes. . . . No. . . . That is, you can do whatever you want. But of course you must realize,' said Grace, as if it had been from the first the most obvious thing in the world, 'that properly speaking there isn't any business left any more?'

'No,' said Anne levelly, 'I didn't realize that.'

Sigourney, who had not yet quite grasped what it was they were saying, had the sense that something

outrageous was about to be perpetrated in that fantastic shop. They were so terribly calm about it. The Taylor woman, casually making the announcement that she was about to marry Hogarth Stubbs, seemed to him to have gone temporarily insane. But there was no madness about them; no, the trouble was that it was all the other way, there was something chilling in it. Anne was cool, like the depths of a still lake, and Grace — Grace was as pointed and as cold as a steel spike.

'Well,' she said, with a trace of righteous impatience beginning to appear in her voice, 'you ought to have. Good heavens, you've known as well as I have that we've been losing money almost since we started.'

'But you've always told me that was only because we were getting started.'

'I know. I thought so. But that can't go on forever. It was good as a speculation. But neither of us ever thought of it as more than a speculation, and it's simply turned out the wrong way. The fact is, my dear, we're really absolutely up against it.' She pushed one of the papers across toward her partner. 'I've been working out the figures. . . .'

'Never mind,' said Anne, 'I don't want to see them.'

'Well, here it all is. You could see for yourself that we're absolutely all through. We couldn't go on anyway. It was the finish, whatever I might have done. This — this other — my own affair, I mean, just happened.'

'Oh,' said Anne, 'it just happened.'

'For Heaven's sake, don't be unreasonable about it!' Grace exclaimed. 'Naturally, I'm terribly sorry.

And I've put every cent of my own into it, too, you know that. It's not my fault, is it?'

'Is everything lost?'

Grace looked about her, shrugging her shoulders. 'No; all this may bring in something. I don't know how much it will pay. A little, maybe. I've been making some estimates here. . . .'

'And what do you expect me to do while you are away?'

'You see,' said Grace, 'this other thing just happened. You understand my position, don't you? What else could I do? We probably won't be back for a month or so — we're going to Canada. After that I'm going to manage his copyrights for him. So I thought, well, that you might want to take over the question of winding up the concern. I've arranged some notes for you about it — people to see, and so on.'

'But Grace,' said Anne quietly, 'you cannot do this way. It's not possible. You cannot be so crude.'

The words dropped, definitively, into the midnight stillness of the place. It was true. No one could be so crude as that. Jasper, as he grasped what it was the woman was about, felt the indignation rising in him.

'But you *must* see *my* point of view,' exclaimed Grace, 'you must be reasonable about it!'

The enormity of that righteous impatience had the effect of waking him up with a start. 'But — but this is sheer atrocity!' he exploded. 'You can't play around with people's money like this!' If Anne would not defend herself, he felt that he had to. 'Do you think the thousand dollars and all the work she's put into this place just aren't anything at all? Do you think you can chuck the whole business after she's

gone into it to help you out, simply because for some crazy reason Hogarth Stubbs wants to elope with you . . .?'

Anne had turned quickly toward him, her lips parted, as if to suppress this outburst of his loyalty. But it was Grace who spoke first. His words seemed to have fired her suddenly. Her two elbows on the table, she clenched her hands before her so fiercely that the knuckles were white; she gripped the point of her chin with her thumbs, so that her lips spoke levelly above the ridge of her hands, and her eyes were hot with an apparently uncontrollable scorn. 'That's all very well for you,' she said. 'For both of you. Things go wrong, so you've got to hang on to me. I've got to give up everything I want to save your precious skins. Just because I happen to be the sort that can do things. Thanks. I enjoy the compliment. But I suppose you think I want to spend my life running an art shop, and so you can't imagine why he wants to elope with me. Thanks again. Let me tell you, *she's* all right. Oh, yes, she'll always have some fool or other like you hanging around to be nice and sweet and attentive and bawl out all the people — yes, all the people with guts in 'em — that she happens to come up against. Yes, she's all right, and you're all right, God help you, but where do you think *I* come out in this — in this — in ——'

This torrent of an astounding bitterness suddenly seemed to choke her off. She was furious. As if it were she who had been the victim of the betrayal. Her lips could not quickly enough give passage to her indignation. She was actually stuttering. 'Grace!' said Anne. Grace never took her eyes off Sigourney. She forced her words into order again. 'Let me tell

you,' she exclaimed, 'you don't even know what I'm talking about. You're an idiotic child. You're both of you children. Have you ever had yourself torn in two? Not by a damned sight. You couldn't. You haven't got the courage to let yourself be. Everything comes your way — your silly, stupid way — everything *you'll* ever want, anyhow.' It was positively a tirade. It was difficult to know even what she was trying to say, but the force and passion of it appalled him.

She probably did not know herself. Her ideas came up in choked fragments, anyhow, the wreckage of some long enduring warfare within herself, all flung out in that hard, low, level voice, so concentrated that it seemed to occupy a single plane in the space of the room. As though a person sitting on the floor or standing on a chair would not have heard it at all. 'A thousand dollars,' she said; 'so you think I haven't got anything more important than somebody's thousand dollars to think of?' Or again: 'Yes, I'm efficient, I'm a machine, I can make money'; or a great deal about her 'point of view' and about 'what I get out of it'; and even one or two sentences that were just words, all tumbled out, with never a lift in the voice, in quite the wrong order, so that they had no meaning whatever. And then suddenly she stopped, dead still, and dropped both her hands upon the table and stared at the papers spread out there before her. There was a ghastly silence.

'That's that,' she said, shuffling the papers up into a docket. 'You'll find everything you want here, or in the books.' She rose. 'I'm going,' she said, in a wearied voice. 'I'm through. Done. Do you understand?' She tossed her head once toward Jasper.

'You can help her. She needn't worry. You've helped her enough times already.' And she passed on that word into the street, swinging the door heavily to behind her.

Jasper abruptly sat down.

But Anne, on the other hand, slowly arose, and began thoughtfully putting the displaced lampshades back upon their brackets, as people after the passage of a hurricane begin picking up the trivial odds and ends, not because they are of any importance, but as a sign that the hurricane is over. 'But,' said Jasper, 'it *is* atrocious. It's unspeakable. She can't be allowed. . . .'

Anne, the foolish little piece of painted parchment in her hand, smiled quietly and meditatively at him. The betrayal, she saw, was complete, irrevocable, unanswerable. It would be like a man, she supposed, to want to do something about it.

She turned around to affix the shade. 'Do you remember, Jasper,' she said with her back to him, 'that I asked you once whether you intended to abandon me, like all the others?'

'Good God!'

'So you see. . . .'

'But what does it all mean?' he said, still a trifle stunned, I suppose, by the force of the explosion.

'It means that she is going to get married,' said Anne, touching the tip of her thumb absently to her lips. It was a gesture of hers — not a particularly attractive one, I suppose, but one which Jasper always thought to be the perfection of gracefulness, simply because it was hers, and she could not do an ungraceful thing. 'I don't think,' she finished, 'that anything would stop her.'

'I hope they'll be happy,' he said vindictively.

'No. I don't know anything about him. But he won't make her happy. Not if she gives herself to him so wholly as that. She's doing it against her will.'

'Against her will? But that isn't possible.'

Anne nodded. 'Yes it is, Jasper. Against her will. The trouble is that it's too late; she fought it too long.' Yes, Anne thought, she fought it too long; it was bound to break something in her, something was bound to give way. But Hogarth Stubbs! 'Nothing,' she said aloud, with a certain gentleness that moved Sigourney profoundly, 'I suppose will ever make her happy.'

And so, unconsciously, Anne Martin pronounced judgment upon her own fate. But she was not at that moment thinking very much about her own ultimate fate. Rather it was of her own fatality — of the accidents of the present which might guide her life but which could not, she supposed, determine it. As she was still standing, Sigourney got to his feet again and came toward her. Leaning against the edge of the table she watched him approach — neat, in his solid white shirt-front and black coat, but with his well-set head and his strong, well-nerved hands suggesting to her a man who would be effective, able to cope with practical, direct obstacles in the open air. If only he were in the open air, away from these stuffy difficulties in which he seemed to enwind himself, and which no one probably could ever really understand. Certainly, she thought, he could not understand them himself. The open air, she thought, the open air, away from all difficulties and involvements. 'It seems to me close here,' she said.

Both of them were still rather shaken by that scene

with Grace. It heightened the emotional tension; brought them suddenly into a closer feeling of intimacy. He sat down on the edge of the table, turned toward her. 'What are you thinking of?' he said. 'It isn't really close here at all. You weren't just thinking of that. You were thinking of something else.' His voice trembled a little, as it did sometimes when he was speaking alone with her.

'I was thinking of myself, I suppose,' she said. 'What am I going to do now?'

It seemed to stop him short. 'Of course!' he said. 'That wretched woman. . . . You know, I can hardly believe it, even now. She's just done you in. She's swindled you. You had a thousand dollars in this.'

Anne looked at him, and engulfed him suddenly in the enchantment of her smile. 'A thousand dollars! Didn't you hear Grace say that she had more important things to think about than somebody's thousand dollars? No,' she said to him quietly, 'I only wonder whether perhaps I didn't have my self-respect in it.'

'Your self-respect?'

'Not quite that, perhaps,' said Anne. 'But, well, what is there left? She has simply — gone back on me. I don't think that other people can ever hurt one, not really. One always hurts one's self, I suppose. But this just means that one has to begin all over again.'

'Anne ——'

'Yes?'

'I think I see what you mean. It's rotten having people being beastly toward you.' Anne nodded, slowly. Perhaps she was allowing herself a little self-pity. He thought she was being very sad. 'What I

would like to say, Anne, is that you can always trust me.' He half put out his hand in her direction. 'I'd like to say that, more than anything I know. I guess I can't. I guess I belong to some one else. There's my — my misfortune.'

His 'failure' she thought, distastefully. That idiotic failure that he would not shake himself free from. He began clasping and unclasping his hands, over and over again, as if the intense emotional energy which he managed to keep out of his voice were running to waste through his finger-tips. All at once she laid her own cool fingers over those agitated ones. They fell still immediately. And she looked at him.

Yes, she looked up at him, out of the depths of a failure of her own, quite as real as his, perhaps, even if she would not consciously admit it. A failure of her spiritual integrity. She was quite truthful when she said that it was not the money; it was the treachery which had shocked her. It was the weakness which that seemed to reveal in her own defenses against the world. It was the violence which that did to the moral framework of her life. She believed in her own peculiar genius as intensely as Jasper believed in his intellect, and it had let her down. She had prided herself in her freedom and her capacity to use it, but she had used it to no purpose, and had been unable to prevent its ending in this rather sordid kind of betrayal.

Greenwich Village had not been a success. But she could not merely sit down to the futility of life in her apartment. No; when a breach like that has been made in the walls, the only thing for a courageous spirit is to find some means by which to close it. Anne never expressed such motives to herself. But

unless they were her motives, I do not know how her actions are to be explained. For what she did was, to look up at Jasper.

And Jasper — Jasper looked down upon her through the mist of her transcendent beauty, of her transcendent desirableness, of the wave of mystery and pain which her close presence could always evoke in him. She treats me with a kind of deliberate torture, he thought, for which I could blame her if it were ever possible to blame her for anything. Whatever she does would be right, he thought, no matter how much it might hurt. It would be right because she did it. He was a little mad, I suppose. One generally is. And the sense of intimacy between them, now that they were alone in the deserted shop, after that episode with Grace Taylor, was very strong.

'She has fought against it too long,' said Anne, her fingers still lightly laid across his own, but her face turned away, so that it was the line of her cheek and throat that he saw, 'and now she will never be happy. She is going to marry him. She has turned her whole energy into it, as if it were a business enterprise. My dear,' said Anne, 'I think perhaps love is too important a matter ever to be treated that way. Do you imagine that it is always worth fighting?'

She spoke slowly, seeming to convey some deeper significance in the words. What do you mean, what do you mean, was what he wanted to cry at her. But a man cannot always be asking what things signify. 'I don't know,' he said weakly, 'but you must have some *basis* to go on . . .' And under the touch of her cool and steady fingers he felt as though he had been taken apart — 'disassembled' his thought said, like a piece of his own engineering machinery — and that

his spirit was lying in fragments at her feet, each fragment more stupid, more feeble to express what in his better nature and his whole soul he really was, than every other.

'If there is something real, if there is something genuine in us,' said Anne, 'we don't need any basis, Jasper. If we take care of ourselves, it seems to me, one needn't worry about the other things.'

'If we can take care of ourselves,' he said.

What is it that holds him in so, she wondered. It is as if there were a kind of weight, something leaden at the bottom. Are all men that way, perhaps; is there the residuum of some ancestral fear in them which women, who are so much the clearer-eyed, have forgotten about long ago? Or is it just the stupid ugliness of cities and people and conventions — like this wretched scene with Grace, which cannot, which could not touch us.

'Jasper, my dear,' she said softly, 'I can go with you, you know, to that island of yours. Have you heard . . .? As it turns out, it would be very simple, if it is what we want. There seems a kind of fate about it . . .'

I cannot, she half framed the thought to herself, tell him in so many words that Cass Morgan has offered me a job there, and that if I take the job it will seem perfectly right to the world, and that there will thus be no difficulties and no entanglements for either of us. Women can think practically about such things, but it seems to frighten men.

She cannot, he thought, say in so many words that Cass Morgan has offered her a job there, and that if she takes the job she can live with me and there will be no trouble. It is what she means, it must be what

she means, but she cannot say so; it is only men, whose thoughts are vile, who put such things into words even to themselves.

'Morgan ——' he said unsteadily. She nodded. 'But, Anne,' he said, 'would you really do that, with all that means, just for me . . .?'

They were close together by the table, and she looked at him very steadily and courageously through those great eyes of hers. But, it seemed to him, as if from a vast distance. 'I would go, Jasper,' she said at last, 'with all that it means. But only if you take me.'

He had not dreamed that she would be willing to do that. For a moment he was dumb with what seemed to him the marvel of this suddenly revealed devotion.

For a moment she was silent before what appeared to her the perversity of his masculinity. Couldn't he, after all, understand that these things if they are to have value must be taken lightly, like play?

'If I take you . . .?' he repeated. Again she nodded. 'But Anne, I cannot urge you. You know, I haven't the right ——'

'If that's the way you feel about it, Jasper,' she said, her voice remote from him, 'why then — why then I must look into a rather empty future, I suppose. If you are a bound man, no. It is for you to say, not I. Only, no other way is possible.'

'It would be dishonorable,' he said at length.

There was the faintest increase in the pressure of her hand upon his own, and then it was gone entirely. She had made no movement of her body, no other movement whatever, but to him it was as if she had at once receded to an enormous distance, into an-

other world, where she stood alone, with a great nobility and a great loneliness.

And to her it was as if in withdrawing her hand she had withdrawn from the one fine and genuine thing which this period of her life had to offer her. 'If you cannot understand this much for my sake,' she said, 'it would be of no use.' She did not attempt to explain. She knew that she wanted, badly, the support of his devoted admiration. She let go of it simply because she knew that except on her own terms it could prove only an illusion. I do not think that she was as noble as Jasper supposed, because I doubt that any woman could be that, but to make that kind of resignation requires, it seems to me, a certain nobility of spirit.

Time dripped away. The man ached with an appalling sense of loss. But, he thought, there must be some way out of this utter wretchedness. But, thought Anne, the music of that dance orchestra is still running in my head. And then she became conscious of the fact that he was speaking. 'I will take you,' he was saying. 'Maybe I am beginning to understand a little — at last. I will take you, Anne, like this, if you will come.' And he had laid his own hand, with its strong and nervous grasp, over hers.

It is possible that the gods which we set up in our own minds may after all have gratitude, and may at times be of some use to us. It must have been at that very moment more or less that Nina Bradstreet's amusement was repaying her long devotion by coming suddenly to her rescue. And in this hour of desolation it was Jasper's logic which had come to his.

Yes, it was a logical construction. How could she be expected to have guessed that? For he did not tell

her. She had said that he must do this for her sake, and it had suddenly seemed reasonable to him that he should. He remembered that he had tried to devote himself to his wife, and that in the end it had turned out to be the merest egotism, because you cannot devote yourself to another unless you are ready to sacrifice something within you. Well, to betray Elizabeth in this fashion, he thought, would be dishonorable and a violation of his integrity; but his uprightness meant something to him — it was a part of his own conception of himself — and to sacrifice that would be, genuinely, a sacrifice. Where Anne seemed ready to give up so much for him, he thought that she had the right to ask him to give up that much for her.

To gain anything so worth while as this he must be willing to lose something which was of value. He had known for a long time that he could never return to Elizabeth; he had been clinging, not to her, but to his own integrity. He saw it abruptly as a form of self-love. Anne, who could do nothing wrong, had a right to demand it of him. It even crossed his mind — will you believe it? — that the surrender would be a kind of expiation for what he had unwittingly done to his wife. And silently Jasper Sigourney made the surrender; and sacrificed what he thought was his honor because he thought it right to do so.

It was a mad idea, and one, I imagine, which would scarcely be sanctioned by professional moralists. But for all that, perhaps, it was none the less moral. Both Anne and Jasper, I think, came to their conclusions honorably according to whatever lights they had — which was probably a main reason why the results were so unsatisfactory. For in that fine coil of

self-deceptions which was the inevitable consequence, how could either of them possibly know what the other one was about? So that odd and very serious scene in the batik shop at two o'clock in the morning had all the elements of comedy in it; and in a world where nothing really matters very much it is easy to smile at them. For Anne believed essentially that the world is fantastic and that the only truth is truth to one's self; while Jasper believed essentially that we are fantastic and that the only truth is truth to external principle, to an 'explanation' and a rule. It happens, I suppose, very often that way. . . .

They had both risen from the uncomfortable table edge and were standing, close together, their four hands clasped. Anne no longer heard in her ears the throbbing beat of that music of the iron age, nor did Jasper; it had died down and vanished somehow, and if they heard anything at all in the massive silence which ensued, it was I suppose a much older music than that, at once more strange and more terrible, from a time before iron had even been invented.

'I am cold here, Jasper,' said Anne all at once in a funny little voice. 'Take me home.'

But he took her in his arms first. . . . And so that was the ultimate conclusion of Nina's party.

XI

It was, as Nina said, 'outrageous.' Exactly — an outrage; an outrage to all conceivable proprieties, including those of simple common-sense, which are the last and I suppose the most important. As if there were any basis of practicality whatever in that amazingly romantic experiment. 'Running away to a deserted island!' said Nina, in a tone of infinite distaste. 'Don't they *know* that there isn't any more conspicuous a spot in the world than a desert island?'

There was, there was always, I thought, a touch of the pathetic in that little lady, in spite of all her neatness, her precision, her ironic amusement. She was prim enough, and finely elegant, sitting there in her finely elegant Louis XV drawing-room; but nevertheless I couldn't help thinking of a child, a child who has been deceived by the most laudable of purely scientific motives into trying the effects of a pin on its new balloon. In her bright eyes there was a shade of precisely the same uncomprehending dismay over the fact that anything which began in so honorable an impulse could eventuate in such unwarranted disaster. It was useless to tell her that it had all been an accident — that whatever those two might think they were doing, they had really been pushed into it by an almost blatantly obvious fatality. You might have thought that Nina, amid the wreckage of her innocent little intrigue, would have taken refuge in the sheerly casual perversity with which it had all gone wrong. But she insisted upon more complex causes. 'That Morgan man,' she said, 'must have

known. Of course it was intentional. Of course he was driving at something. But what on earth . . .?'

Well then, I argued, Morgan and his motives together, whatever they might be, were only an accident, only another of those irrelevant conjunctions the encounter with which goes to make up the business of living for any man. 'If it hadn't been Morgan, if it hadn't been Anne Martin for that matter, it would have been something else.'

'I suppose you think I'm an accident,' said Nina, shrugging her shoulders daintily. I protested. 'But what I want to know is,' she said, 'why did he do it? Why?' I could not answer that. Nor, it seemed, could the late spring sunshine on her rug, no matter how abstractedly she studied it. We did not know. . . .

At Mackerel Ledge, I fancy, they did not care. How should they have cared? How should they have cared for anything on earth, except for themselves and for that radiant, that incomparable mantle which the earth wore, through the warm sunshines and the crystalline hazes of that diamond weather? To come there was not like coming into the fresh air; rather, it was like coming into a fresh world, where cities were yet to be invented, where philosophies were yet to be thought of, and where everything was play because work was still as natural as breathing. A world at once too old to suffer as it was too young to think; a world so young that everything lay ahead, because it was so old that everything had been forgotten. 'How unhappy you can be,' said Jasper, 'when you are a child. But if you want to put it that way, these rocks I suppose were pretty unhappy when they were being made — getting torn and pounded

up by geologic cataclysms and all that sort of thing. And it took a long time and a lot of changes before even the ocean got to be the changeless sea.'

'And will there never be any changes again?' she asked him.

'No,' he said, 'not ever. Every day they are different, the islands and the sea, but they're always the same too because they are there, they've arrived, they've come home . . .' And he tightened his grasp upon her hand where it lay enlaced in his.

'But suppose there should be an earthquake?'

'Oh, of course,' he said, 'if you want me to give you a lecture in geology . . .'

No, it seemed that Anne did not want him to give her a lecture in geology. 'Were you unhappy when you were a child, Jasper?' she asked him, quite irrelevantly. . . .

Mackerel Ledge is not, as Sigourney had understood, actually off the coast of Maine. As a matter of fact, it lies much nearer to New York harbor than that, but from its deep detachment from anything even suggesting New York it might just as well lie off the coast of Malabar. That small notch in the cliffs where the 'china mine' stood was as secluded as a coral atoll in the South Pacific, and this despite their discovery that the island itself was not deserted in the least, but if anything rather an important and populous one. The farm-land, however, ran out into barren moors, where there were not even sheep at graze, three or four miles before one came upon their beach; while the towns and summer colonies and steamer landings were all right away from them on the north shore. But it was precisely because of these summer colonies, as a matter of fact, that their con-

cealment was so unexpectedly complete. Nina was quite right; if they had gone to a coral atoll they would have been gloriously conspicuous, but the only effect of their removal to Mackerel Ledge was that most people immediately forgot all about them. Their mail all came through the post office at Ocean View, which was too normal a summer address to arouse any comment.

And so there was nothing to worry over. The half-dozen men employed on the work came from town every morning in a truck and went back in the evening, and if the boss and his wife wanted to live there in the old brick cottage left over from the earlier exploitation, they could see nothing remarkable in it. Anne's duties, especially during this preliminary period (it was devoted largely to rebuilding some sheds and the old pier and to getting in some machinery for handling the clay) seemed very vague. She decided that her employment was a result of Mrs. Perkins's profoundly suspicious temperament rather than of any necessary work to be performed, and so she merely wrote or answered a letter now and then under a date at Ocean View. For the rest, she devoted herself to the romantic business of keeping house in a wilderness (fresh milk, eggs and anything else that was needed came over every morning in the truck) or to dreaming, among the bayberries at the edge of the cliffs, over the wide expanse of sky and far-away azure islands, and the impeccable blue of the sea.

Diamond weather, diamond weather. May softened into June, and the sun came down in the long afternoons and filled up their little ravine with drowsy warmth, like a cup, and the dragon-flies darted their shimmering blue spikes among the bramble and the

bracken, and the row of marigolds she had put in slept against the warm brick of the cottage. Their ravine — there was a brook in it — fell abruptly down from the gray-green backs of the moors, a secretive pocket in the hills, and then opened out between two cliffs onto the shingly beach and the immense circle of the sea, draped upon the horizon in its perpetual haze. The clay came out of one of the cliffs, and there was a weathered building among the boulders and the men at work, and Jasper in an open-necked blue flannel shirt and a slouch hat, seeming very capable and very absorbed. 'What is he thinking about?' she would ask herself sometimes, looking down from the cliff edge upon his diminished figure, 'What is he thinking about?' And Jasper would be thinking whether they could get that casting in place by putting a skid under it, and of how beautiful she was.

But it was best, of course, after the men had gone. Then they could wander for miles along the deserted beach in the fragile calm of sundown, climbing over the larger rocks or over the driftwood, scoured so smooth, so white and so clean — so infinitely clean — by that clear water. And everything was alive there, the air and the sea gulls that dipped and cried in it, the water and the seaweed that it washed back and forth upon the rocks — everything was alive, and nothing, not even themselves, was stupidly human. Not even the clock-work fishermen in the lobster boats that went puttering along up the shore to a small bay, a mile or two farther on, where there was a fishing village. No, there were no people there, no *things*, as Anne had said, nor complications; they were shielded from all that, sheltered away under the

long line of cliffs at their backs into a world and sky absolutely their own. And so they would sit down in the ultramarine dusk, and smoke, and watch Mackerel Ledge Light upon its lonely pile of rocks off shore; until, as the night came over, it would all at once open its single red eye, observe them for a moment as if in affected surprise, and then wink it solemnly at them.

'As if,' said Anne happily, 'he were a nice old gentleman with a defective sense of humor.'

And Jasper removed the pipe from his lips to give the old gentleman a judicious attention. 'Yes,' he said, 'he's an uncle. I'm positive he's an uncle. If he had any nephews he'd make 'em all sick with chocolate bars.'

'And after he winked at us the first time,' said Anne, 'he thought maybe it wasn't quite nice or too forward, and so he can't think of any way out of it except to go right on winking and pretend it's just a habit with him!'

The *Atlantic Coast Pilot* will explain to you that Mackerel Ledge is a third-order light, flashing red; it is unaware of the fact that his true name is the Dutch Uncle and that he flashes because of the innate delicacy of his sentiments and the faultiness of his sense of humor. But so it was — in that marvelous world which they made for themselves.

'The future ——,' Jasper began.

But Anne laid her hand upon his mouth. 'There isn't any future — here,' she said.

'No,' said Jasper, 'there isn't any future — for us.'

And if that did not mean quite the same thing that she had meant, I suppose that neither of them, in their perfect sense of union, noticed it.

What they did notice were the lights and colors and forms of things, the lace-work of foam where a wave broke, the cries of the night-birds winging off upon their secret and important errands, the sounds of the water, or — when they had kindled their beach-fire — the golden veils of sparks springing from the flames, the ruddy light upon the rocks and on each other's faces, the trail of light across a dark tidepool in a rock. And Anne would sit sometimes, her chin on her knees, her large eyes turned away from him, turned to the ocean and to the stars drifting down into the west. And that would make him uneasy after a time, and he would ask her of what she was thinking, and she would say that she wasn't thinking of anything, and continue, staring in that way at the stars; until he would put his arm about her and she would drop the mass of her hair upon his shoulder, and the slight shadow, whatever it had been, would pass away into the immense silence of the night. But still she would not speak, nor would she tell him of what it was that she had been thinking. Until finally the fire would be gone entirely and the constellations would come up over the cliff and look silently at them, and she would shiver with the breath of the night air and make him warm her, happily, in his arms. And then they would go home together, and as they turned into the secret fastness of their ravine the Dutch Uncle would still be winking at them, solemnly.

And so they lived there, remote, suspended in that fairyland of the real world, hung round as with an impenetrable curtain by the light shimmer of the haze forever upon the horizon. A gauze-like curtain, enclosing them in the powerful romance of the actual

— of the bare rock, of the wind across the bare hills, of the sunlight across the eternal sea, and of their own attunement to the primitive and the natural within them. What did they say to each other? It was not what they said that counts, but what they saw. And Anne saw the beauty of a tranquil summer, and Jasper, I suppose, saw the beauty of eternity, where if one has made the surrender of one's self nothing else can matter. But both of them, I fancy, saw at least this much together — they saw the deep, embracing cleanliness of the sea, that profound purity from all the unspeakable muddinesses of humanity, that stark clarity which seems to eliminate the nasty and the mean from everything that it envelopes. And nothing, it seemed to both of them, could be more right than this life of theirs; and perhaps, however ironic it may be that they should have thought so, that was no more than the truth — so long as they lived it.

They saw all the insignificant things in each other which they had previously overlooked, such as what they liked for dinner or what they said when they banged their heads or broke a fingernail. They made the trivial discoveries which in the end are alone of consequence, and they found out that all the important things meant nothing whatever. 'Was it like this when you were in the North Georgia mountains?' she asked him half mischievously.

'No,' he said soberly. 'It's so different that I can't describe to you how different it is.' And so then she made him tell her about his marriage. 'There was a dead weight about it,' he said, finding that he had to make a real effort to recapture that lost and forgotten state of mind. 'She and I might sit to-

gether, just as we are sitting now, but nothing — nothing would *happen*.'

Anne smiled. 'Nothing happens here,' she said.

'Except that just about everything happens . . . I mean, we would just say things to each other.'

'But don't we just say things to each other?'

'You're trying to tease me,' said Jasper. 'But you know what I mean. Then, it was just words. I never understood her, I suppose. I wonder if she ever understood me? . . . After a little of that, of course, why a fellow would naturally get tired and go off and do something else.'

'Jasper,' she said, more thoughtfully, 'will you ever go back to her?'

'Go back!' He looked at her in a sudden troubled astonishment. 'How can I? What are you talking about? I can't go back now.'

'But I might die.'

'You won't die,' said Jasper, and dismissed the subject. It was not hard to dismiss the subject, because she was resting lightly against his knee, close. . . . That she had broached it at all seemed only a sign of her complete confidence in him, and that he had replied as he had seemed only a sign of his confidence in her. And if sometimes when he was away from her and busy about the work he would be struck by the absurdity of all that, and its impossibility in a world of conventions and money, why, he would abandon the thought. For, he said to himself, whatever their future might become, it could only be something richer and deeper and more wonderful, because now that they had each other nothing could ever matter. He knew this was true because he had devoted himself; he had made his sacrifice and

she had accepted it, and in her he was invulnerable.

Anne for her part never thought of their adventure as absurd or impractical, for as she felt his capable arms about her tremble with her own power over them, it seemed to her merely a lovely and gracious accident of life, and nothing in life ever seemed to her absurd. If she sometimes thought about the future, it was when he was closest to her rather than when he was away, and then she thought of it only because she knew that nothing which is pleasant can ever last. But it was still the future, and so did not matter. She was wiser than Jasper was, she knew, with a deeper insight into life and a surer touch; and so she would summon herself back from such wordless reveries when she saw the childish look of perplexity which they brought into his eyes. Then she would talk to him, and draw him out and watch the play of her own spirit in his face as a dramatist, perhaps, watches the play of his own thought upon the serried ranks of his audience. It was less Jasper's effect upon her which answered her need, than her effect upon him.

'What are you going to do, Jasper,' she said, 'when we quarrel? Will you pull my hair, or beat me?'

'But I couldn't quarrel with you,' he told her, exactly as if he were stating an obvious fact.

At that, however, there was a shadow in Anne's eyes. 'But I want you to quarrel with me,' she said. 'You'll have to, you know.'

Jasper smilingly said that he would do his best. 'No,' said Anne, 'I mean it.'

'But Anne,' he said obtusely, 'how could I ever? Everything you do is right for me.' And Anne for

some reason or other did not seem to like that, and they were actually drifting into a kind of perverse quarrel right there, about nothing. Instead however Anne abruptly flung a pillow at him and told him not to be such a silly. And after that she made him tell her about his boyhood, and tried, as he spoke, to form a picture of him in those days, a little boy in those shadowy surroundings. . . .

There was, for example, that rather terrible grandfather who had helped to build the Union Pacific Railroad, and whose colorful visits to Jasper's father's house in Chicago had been among the liveliest of his recollections. The old man, as Sigourney remembered him at the end of his sufficiently active life, had been in the habit of drinking a great many whiskey sours, of talking with a thunderous but affectionate contempt about his son's scientific monographs, and unintentionally frightening his grandson with the livid scar across his gray temple. That scar was the only enduring consequence of Hugh Sigourney's interest in reformist politics in the West during the eighties. 'It was still rather in the "no-swearing-here-it-sounds-like-hell" period, I guess,' the boy told her, 'but the old man must have been effective.' And Anne remembered her own father's championship of political reform. 'Anyhow, he elected his ticket all right, though I guess the campaign expense account must have included an item for revolver cartridges. But you know how much good it was electing a reform ticket in those days. The old man ended finally with a big hog-farm in Iowa, but he used to come up to see us two or three times a year. I think he used to do a little private painting the town red on those occasions, because Dad, who used to chum around

with the University of Chicago people, would look mighty solemn sometimes during those visits. A kind of pained expression. Dad's funny, anyhow.'

Jasper, she thought, seemed queerly unrelated to that colorful figure he painted for her of his grandfather, and she pressed him for more details about the far-away little boy who listened to those tales of empire — told before a gas-log fire in the expensive, 1890 rococo house in Chicago which he described to her. 'But granddad was a good sport,' he said. 'He used to let me listen to his repeater watch, which I could never quite get over feeling ought really to have been a gun, because the only kind of repeater I had ever heard of until then was a repeating rifle.' And after that she fell very silent, and when Jasper asked her what the matter was, she said, 'Nothing,' but what really was the matter was that all this history made her feel a little lonely, a trifle lost. It was all so infinitely far away, so different, dealing with a Jasper who was so little what this Jasper was. He made her see himself, a tiny figure in knickerbockers, far off at the end of an infinitely long perspective — a child who had no knowledge of her and no need of her whatever.

Perhaps she was jealous of his childhood. I don't know. She certainly was not jealous of his wife. She rather liked to talk to him about Elizabeth; she even called upon her imagination to infuse some life into the rather vague picture which was the best he could supply to her. It pleased her to think of Elizabeth as a dark-eyed, flashing type of Southern beauty — a stupid woman, perhaps, but a dashing one, with charm and spirit. On the whole, that added to her sense of security. It was in the presence of that little

boy that Anne felt insecure, wandering suddenly very close to the edge of that great chaos of change and loneliness which Anne knew very well to be the picture of the real world. For things had not been this way before and they would not be this way again; but why should they remind themselves of that? . . .

One day a letter arrived in which Casimir Morgan announced his intention of visiting the clay works in his capacity as advertising manager for the enterprise. It did not trouble Anne. The secure isolation which she found at Mackerel Ledge was not really a matter of geography at all; it was a spiritual remoteness which she enjoyed there rather than the physical one. But the letter seemed to create an unwarranted excitement in Jasper. So she told him that if he liked she would go into Ocean View, a place impeccable in its respectability, for the day. But for herself she did not care. 'And you know,' said Anne, 'I rather like Cass Morgan after all. He seems to have a kind of insight, sometimes . . . There *is* something about the man.'

So Jasper, who imagined in his infatuation that he had been troubled only on her account anyway, saw how much more gallant a plan it was to wear their courage on their sleeves; and Casimir ultimately did come over one morning in a hired automobile, entirely prepared to accept any situation which he might find. Similarly, they accepted Casimir, and gave him a truly first-rate luncheon including lobsters, which Jasper, going out in the catboat he kept there, had fished up from under the stony feet of the Dutch Uncle.

It must have been a slightly queer party for all that, in the cool, low-ceiled, whitewashed little

dining-room they had fitted up, with the sunshine very white and glaring beyond their fly-screened windows and very soft and tinged with green within them. The brick cottage was not really an old house, but it had been put up by a local builder who had not lost the old traditions. It possessed a huge fieldstone fireplace, where Anne had hung a copper saucepan and a brightly burnished Cape Cod firelighter, and it was cool and comfortable and homelike. 'Yes,' Morgan told me afterward, 'it was homelike as hell. I guess that was what made it embarrassing . . .'

But Anne set the lobster mayonnaise down before him with a flourish and an engaging sweetness, and Jasper gravely explained the progress he was making with the work. And, although all three of them were of course thinking about something quite different, Morgan explained the arrangements that had been made in New York and how they proposed to market the product. Until finally the sense that the whole thing — the works, the business, the ménage in the cottage and Morgan's publicity — was only a romantic piece of quite impossible play-acting was hardly apparent to any of them. 'You should have seen us,' said Morgan. 'We were just like kids. All sitting around as solemn as the devil, playing grown-ups. Yes, I was as much of a kid as they were.' He was thoroughly contemptuous about it. But one could see that with all his cynicism this rather lonely man had been impressed, in spite of himself, by the beauty of that marvelous play-acting.

At any rate, he seems to have pushed his coffee-cup away from him (it was a charming blue, that coffee service, which he remembered from having seen it in Anne's Charles Street apartment) and

played in a somewhat abstracted way with his cigarette, so that Anne asked him quite suddenly why, as a matter of fact, he had come to see them. 'I know it's not the business,' she said calmly. 'We haven't told you anything that you don't know already.'

And then he laughed, rather shortly. 'Oh, all right,' he said. 'Have it your own way.'

'It's us,' said Anne.

'Yes,' he said, 'the plea is guilty. I came down to have a look at the experiment.'

'Then it was vulgar curiosity,' said Anne. 'Was it yours or the Perkinses'?'

'Mine,' said Casimir. 'She thinks you are living at Ocean View. And it wouldn't bother her, no matter where you were living.'

'Then you didn't deserve the lobster,' said Anne. 'You didn't even deserve bread and water.' And she smiled at him serenely.

But Jasper was not serene. He stared at Morgan with a sudden annoyance. 'I like your ——' he began to say, and then stopped, and rising from his chair moved across to the window, where he stood with his back to them. 'It's damned impertinent of you,' he said. 'We haven't got anything to do with you. You can keep your rotten theories out of this.'

But Anne only laughed gently, in the room behind him.

'My dear boy,' said Morgan, 'I confine all my theories to single men —— it's safer.'

'You're terribly fond of safety, aren't you?' said Anne.

'Sure. Better be safe than sorry. That goes with me. Which isn't to say,' he added, 'that once in a

while the being sorry part isn't because you've played too safe.'

'Well,' said Jasper, turning round, 'that's an admission, for you.'

'Once in a while,' said Morgan equably. 'Anyhow, I don't believe yet in jumping off the Washington Monument just for the fun of going down.'

Anne looked at his graying hair, above his bushy eyebrows, and at the deep-set, vigorous eyes beneath them. 'Well,' she said, and tossed her own tawny hair, 'I do.'

'I know you do,' said Morgan. But Jasper did not hear him, for at the moment he was angrily exclaiming that it was no use talking that kind of nonsense.

To Anne, however, there had suddenly come what was I suppose an entirely new thought. 'You know,' she said, gazing at Casimir's rather leonine shagginess, where it was still slouched on the other side of her table, 'I have an idea. I have an idea that it wasn't just a jump. There was a push beside.'

'Eh?' said Morgan.

'Anyway,' said Anne, 'nobody tried to prevent it.'

Morgan seemed to shuffle himself together — there is no other description for the peculiar gesture with which he was apt to confront suspected difficulties. 'Anne,' he said, 'don't go blaming me for ——'

'I'm not blaming you,' said Anne. 'Why did you do it?'

'Well, I hope you two know what you are talking about,' said Jasper, 'because I don't.'

In spite of that, Morgan, who had the large eyes upon him, felt constrained to answer her. 'Suppose,'

he said, in a tone that was meant to be playful, 'I should tell you it was in self-defense?'

'Then I'd tell you not to be grotesque.'

'Well,' said Cass, 'there're all kinds of motives, and self-defense is as good as the next one, I guess. There are some women that I wouldn't mind pushing off the top of the Woolworth Building.'

'That doesn't sound very complimentary,' said Anne.

'It's the principle of the thing,' said Cass. 'Think of all us poor fools in the outer darkness.'

'Oh, for Heaven's sake, shut up,' said Jasper unhappily. Anne did not know whether Morgan was being sarcastic or whether he was not. But Jasper, who seemed troubled by the substance or the manner of this ambiguous conversation, abruptly proposed that they have a look at the works, and Morgan, acceding, immediately got himself up out of his chair. Anne dropped a lovely smile upon the boy, and set herself to clearing away the coffee-cups, humming under her breath.

And so ultimately Cass, after looking appreciatively at the new sheds and pier, and after giving a cigar to Breck, the foreman, and after winning the carpenter's admiration with his unexpected familiarity with that difficult art, took himself off again to Ocean View. Anne said she thought they had both of them got through that very well, and that it set them up in the world, receiving their own guests; but Jasper, awake in the pregnant stillness at four o'clock in the morning, found that the incident had left, if anything, a rather disagreeable taste in the mouth. The breathing at his side was as soft as ever. But there had been a touch of the world of cities and

people, that artificial world, which for Sigourney was in the end the real one. So here again was the necessity for girding up his ideas, arming his logic, facing the inevitable problems. Jasper did not want to do that. All he wanted was to leave things alone. . . .

Diamond weather, diamond weather. But a man's restless mind will never, I suppose, leave him in peace for very long at a time. Perhaps after all the days were not quite flawless. There was that Sunday morning in July, when they had sat together hand in hand, on the crest of their cliff-line. The grasses were sweet about them, with the bees and dragon-flies here and there, and far away below, amid the great sheet of shining blue water marked lightly by the tide and wind, there was one tiny black figure in the Dutch Uncle's lantern, cleaning his eye-glasses, so to speak. And it was all, Anne knew, more beautiful than anything in this world. And it was all, Jasper knew, more beautiful than anything in this world has a right to be. And then he wondered whether perhaps it was not churlish of him to have these shadowy doubts. For there were times when he did not understand her, or she did not understand him. For they had given themselves to each other, which ought to be everything; but if he had to feel vaguely worried and embarrassed just because Cass Morgan came to see them — well, what permanency was there in that?

'The trouble with Cass,' he said, out of the depths of a long and fragrant silence, 'is his everlasting cowardice. Ever since I've known him. He won't do this, he won't do that, because, he says, it's not worth while. He just sits around that office of his and

lives on his income. He just says he won't play, and loafs around while other people do all the work and run all the risks; and then he calls that the wisdom of the ages. It's enough to get on your nerves.'

Anne meditated this for a time, and then: 'But renunciation,' she said, 'takes a kind of courage, if you really mean it.'

'Where's anything courageous in that? I don't mind a fellow who announces that it's all a bad job and gets out with a meat axe to smash things up and change 'em. Cass doesn't do that; all he does is sneer. He goes on the theory that everything's rotten anyway and so what's the use.'

'It makes him interesting,' said Anne, and paused while a dragon-fly hovered sketchily over her knee. 'And supposing that everything really were rotten . . .?'

'But it isn't.'

'No,' she assented. 'But it would take a certain kind of bravery just to believe that it was. I couldn't.'

'Well, you don't have to — now.'

'No, I don't have to now. But everything won't always be like this, Jasper. Suppose you should go away. I might think life was pretty rotten then.'

'I'm not going away, Anne, ever.'

'No . . .' she said, leaving the syllable suspended upon the soft air.

'I hate to hear you talk that way. You don't seem to see what I feel about you, Anne. I'm here for always.'

'Always?'

'For good.'

She shook her head, her eyes fastened upon the horizon.

'Why, what's the matter?'

'Jasper, my dear,' she said, 'you can't tell. You can't ask to know about things like that. What is to happen, happens to us. Nothing could have prevented our being here together, like this. And nothing can prevent — what is to come.'

'What's that?'

'Why,' she said, wishing that he would not look so unhappy about it, 'I had nothing in particular in mind. Whatever it may be.' And she saw that it did not satisfy him, and when he was in that mood, she thought, it was of no use for her to try to satisfy him.

'Sometimes I just can't seem to get at you, Anne.'

'Perhaps,' she said lightly, 'there are times when I don't want you to get at me!' And because that seemed to make him even more unhappy than he was before, she went on: 'Everything is elusive, you know. You are yourself, Jasper. I don't always think I know you. I wouldn't want to. Everything is that way. You can only catch moments — it's like catching fairies, I suppose. Life is like that.'

She saw him restlessly jerk a cigarette out of his case. 'I've never understood what life was like,' he said. 'I mean, I've never understood the way it's built, how it's put together. I don't know the *plan* . . .'

'But it isn't put together. Things happen because they have to. But that doesn't mean there's any special plan ——'

'But that's it! I don't care about *what's* going to happen, but I do want to know *how* it's going to happen. . . . Look at that ship,' he said. A couple of

miles off shore a tramp steamer was solemnly pursuing her way, undeviating, unhastening, across the vast and placid blue of the ocean. There is no gravity on earth, unless it be a philosopher's, like that of a steamship under way on a calm morning; and like a philosopher, too, she left behind her a long, lightly-etched, but ever-widening wake — a trail which spread far out across the waters, advertised the fact of her passage, and vanished forever.

'Look at that ship,' he insisted. 'The skipper doesn't know whether he's going to have any accidents or not. That doesn't worry him; he knows where he's going, what's expected of him, and what kind of accidents they are which might happen. But supposing when he took command,' he said, gesturing with his cigarette, 'he'd found that his owners had bored a lot of holes in the bottom, installed a grand piano in the engine-room, and filled all the coal bunkers up with dynamite? He wouldn't bother himself over what might happen, but he'd blame well get out for some more information on how he was expected to do his voyaging. He would want to know the plan of the thing. He'd say — I'll tell you what he'd say — he'd say: "What's the idea?" Well, what *is* the idea?'

'But what really are you talking about?' she asked him.

He looked at her, a little disconsolate. 'I do what I imagine to be my best,' he said. 'But sometimes it hardly seems to work. A ship is built for something and equipped for some purpose. But I don't seem to be. There is dynamite in my coal bunkers, and a grand piano in my engine-room . . . Oh,' he said abruptly, 'what's the use?'

'What, indeed?' she answered, sensibly enough. And then: 'Don't *worry* about things, Jasper.'

'No. . . . There's nothing to worry about.' And for quite a long time after that they were silent, and so there was nothing to worry over — no, there was nothing.

And after that they wandered off over the moors, and talked in inconsequential phrases and pauses, as two people who are very fond of each other will do, and laughed with each other, and so finally wandered back toward the ravine for their dinner. They did not have to go all the way back to the road in order to get down, but the path dropped off the backs of the moors not so far from the point at which the road began its descent, and looking across to that spot they saw that an automobile was halted there. This was nothing unusual, because people frequently drove over from Ocean View, seeking relief from the perfected civilization of their middle-class summer resort, I suppose, in the wildness of the moor country. They had picnics up there and took walks and so on, but they were never an intrusion, because the gate stopped them at the head of the ravine and there was no other easy way down to the beach.

But what attracted Anne's attention to this automobile was the fact that it seemed to have brought no one except a young woman, who was standing looking down the little valley over the wire frame of the gate. There was the chauffeur, taking a cigarette on the running-board, and this young woman, but no one else. She lifted her head in their direction, abruptly put her hands together before her, and stared at them. A very ordinary young woman, Anne thought, perhaps a school-teacher or stenographer on her vaca-

tion. But the girl continued to look at them, and Anne continued idly to gaze back. . . .

Until suddenly she dropped her hand upon Sigourney's wrist. 'Jasper,' she said in rather a queer voice, 'who is that?'

XII

'Why, then I came away,' said the girl quite simply, in the same perfectly level tone. 'What else was there to do?'

It seemed, amid the placid commonplaces of an Ocean View hotel, to be a very normal statement. Her companion nodded a mechanical agreement. 'Of course.' And then abruptly he dropped his feet from their position against the piazza railing. 'Gosh!' he said as if only then had there dawned upon him the profound oddity of the scene which she was narrating. 'You just left them there . . .?'

Morgan, I imagine, had been expecting her recital to terminate in fireworks of one sort or another. But there weren't any fireworks. She merely came to a full-stop with that absurdly simple statement of fact. She had come away — of course — and then the sense of how queer that was all at once overtook him like a revelation.

Or so he explained it to me. 'For a minute or two,' he said, 'it gave me a funny feeling, as if there were a fake about it somewhere. It wasn't just that she was willing to spin all this yarn to me, sitting there as pretty as you please on the front porch of the Cliff House. I guess I've done enough police reporting to know that you can get most of the facts of birth, death *and* resurrection out of nice dumb little women on the front porches of seaside hotels. But generally they're apt to be weepy about it and have a handkerchief going. And you have to pat 'em on the hand, and you spend most of your time hoping that the

sweet old lady down at the other end won't see you and complain to the management. But there wasn't any weeping,' said Morgan. 'The whole business might've been the most natural thing in the world as far as she was concerned. I tell you, it rather got me.'

And so it must have been an impressive composure, because that was something which very rarely seemed to happen to Morgan. He could not make her out, in spite of the fact that he had gone to some pains in the attempt. But perhaps it was partly because he could not entirely make himself out in this affair. Exactly what Cass Morgan was doing there on the front porch of the Cliff House I don't know; and in the end I am forced to doubt whether he knew either. There was a certain amount of chance in it. But there was a certain amount of volition in it as well. . . .

The Cliff House at Ocean View was not a place in which one would have expected to find Cass Morgan spending a vacation. The piazza commanded a fine prospect of the ocean (if you overlooked the somewhat disconsolate rock-garden on the terrace) and of the big coasting schooners which went drifting down the horizon, lovely in their curving sails. In the seventies, I suppose, it was a first-class resort and may well have been a charming place. But shingled minarets and Gothic stonework made out of wood do not bear up well under the passage of time, and they can be, especially after the shingles have begun to drop out and the paint to flake off, somewhat depressing to the sensitive mind. The rank of broad-armed rocking chairs which lined the piazza railing was filled with both the virtues and the vices of people who spend fifty stuffy weeks out of every fifty-two in semi-surburban flats, and the acrimonious warfares

waged by their children (the Smith and Jones families were at the moment engaged in violent battle over the ping-pong set in the hall) made heavy demands upon one's adaptability. It was fortunate, Morgan thought, that so few people appear to have sensitive minds.

Ocean View, at any rate, did not seem to depress this young woman. All that infernal racket going on behind them over the ping-pong set did not worry her; she was quietly thinking about something else. She could take surroundings like that as a matter of course, and Morgan wondered whether perhaps she were used to them. And yet, and yet, he realized, she could not be accused of having an insensitive mind. No one who could merely walk away, like that, could be called stupid, precisely. . . .

She had told him the whole story without emotion. 'I thought I would have to see the place,' she had begun, in her level, perhaps rather colorless variant of the drawling Southern accent, 'so I got a car from Roberts's garage to drive over there. Roberts only charge two dollars and a half an hour; the others are three. Well, we got over there and stopped by the gate because the man said that was as far as we could go. It's kind of valley, you know, and you can see the cottage down underneath ——'

'Yes,' said Morgan, 'I know.'

'So I was just standing there looking at it ——'

'But what did you expect to see?'

'I reckon I only thought I'd have to know what I was up against,' the girl said.

'But the outside of a house . . .?' he asked in a real curiosity.

'Well, it gives you an *idea*. . . . And then all of a

sudden I looked up, and there they were. Both of them were there. They were coming across a hill and they weren't very far away.'

'And then?'

'They stopped. They saw me. They weren't far off, not far off at all. It was pretty terrible for me.'

'I should think so . . .'

'For a minute, I mean. She is awfully good looking,' said the girl. There was just a touch of bitterness in the voice. 'Then she asked him about me. I couldn't hear them, but I know that's what she was doing. And he told her. And then he wanted to come over and speak to me, but she wouldn't let him.'

'Do you mean that you stood there and let them discuss you?' Morgan asked.

'No, I didn't do that,' said the girl, her eyes fastened upon the rock-garden. Perhaps the tone of the question had hurt her. 'I didn't want him to come over. I didn't want to talk to him — not just then. So I turned my back on them and went over to the car, and began to ask the chauffeur how far it was to Slipwicket. I'd been told there was a village near there called Slipwicket, and I remembered the name because it seemed such a funny one. So I talked to the chauffeur a good while about that, and when I turned around again they had already started down the path. But while I was watching he looked around to see whether I was still there.'

'She didn't want him to speak to you?'

'No.'

'That's funny,' said Morgan, 'in her. . . . What happened then?'

'Why,' the girl had said, 'then I came away.' And the simple finality of the statement had given him his suddenly vivid appreciation of the realities behind that rather peculiar little scene against the grave emptiness of the moors.

His sense of its oddity grew upon him. The battle over the ping-pong set was ending in a sudden and voluble mediation by parents. Morgan heard it in silence. A slightly pimply youth with a tennis racket came down the porch. 'Hi, there, Mrs. Sigourney, do you want a couple of sets this afternoon?'

'No,' said the girl, 'not this afternoon . . .'

'But what are you going to do now?' said Cass.

'I'm not sure. I'm not sure I'm going to do anything — not just right away.'

'But you can't mean you're going to sit down here and spend the summer?'

'Why not? Naturally, I don't enjoy this very much. But it's no use my sitting down at home.'

'What about your name? Of course, he's known here; I suppose the whole town knows about the china works. They'll begin to talk.'

'Well, that's his lookout, isn't it?'

Cass searched her face attentively. It was not a happy face, but there was no agitation in it. 'Gosh!' he exclaimed. 'Of course it is, if you can take that view of it. You're perfect. I didn't know you'd be capable of it.'

It seemed to surprise her. 'Capable of what?' she asked. 'What else would I do?'

Morgan did not answer. He had no answer for the patent naïveté of her surprise. Instead, he began to wonder a little just what he had brought himself into. For he had brought himself into it. It was only

through him that Elizabeth Sigourney had come there at all.

Morgan had a way of developing the most unexpected connections with the most unlikely of people. One of Elizabeth's brothers, it will be remembered, was a civil servant in Washington. It seems that Morgan had known this man well while working there as a Washington correspondent, and that he had remembered him and identified him almost immediately, from what Jasper had said, as the brother of Jasper's wife. At the time he never said anything about this to either Jasper or myself; I don't know why, except that it was rather like him. But at any rate, he seems to have remembered this brother once more after Jasper and Anne went to Mackerel Ledge. What he thought he would gain by it I cannot say, but the fact is that subsequently he had written him a letter.

So much Morgan confessed to me. But precisely what impulse it was which led him to do so, he would never tell me. He did not like to talk about it, and I think perhaps the truth is that he did not know. It is seldom very difficult to unravel a man's motives when the man knows what they are; when the motive remains obscure I suppose it is because it is inexplicable to himself. But there is no doubt that he had written and sent that letter. In time the brother had responded, saying that his sister was coming North and asking Morgan to 'look out for her a little.' Morgan studied the reply for a while and then rammed it into his pocket. 'I was annoyed with myself,' he said. 'It was a fool thing to do.' But still he offered no explanation as to why he had done it. It seems that he carried the brother's note around in

his pocket for some days. Ultimately he decided abruptly to spend a short vacation at the Cliff House at Ocean View. As I have said, he may know what he was doing there. Or again, he may not. . . .

Now, however, as he sat in a rocking chair on the porch talking to this girl, he seems to have been in a restless state of mind. The fact that he had brought her there was sticking out in his thoughts, and he was dissatisfied and disturbed with himself.

'I'm terribly glad you've come,' said the girl. 'It seems like I'd known you for a long time. I suppose that's because you knew Tom so well. And you know Jasper too.' Morgan nodded. 'And her,' Elizabeth finished up.

'Yes, I seem to be a friend of the family.'

'I'm glad,' said the girl. 'It's not so awfully easy for me. I don't mind having some one to talk to about it. And I suppose you don't mind helping me out.'

'I never help any one out,' said Morgan, in an irritated voice. 'But I don't mind doing anything that'll stop Jasper Sigourney from making any bigger fool of himself than can be avoided.'

The girl considered this for some time with a kind of contained seriousness. There seemed an almost terrifying impersonality about her. 'I wondered,' she said at length, 'why you wrote that letter to Tom. I suppose it's Jasper you're interested in.'

'I'm interested in common decency,' said Morgan, frowning. It exaggerated the heaviness of his eyebrows. 'I wrote your brother merely as a friend. Understand, Mrs. Sigourney, I'm in favor of your side in all this. I'm with you.'

'But you never saw me until last week.'

'No,' he said, still seeming rather nettled about

something. 'But this whole affair is just a piece of tom-fool nonsense. It oughtn't to be allowed to go on. They can't act this way. Your husband ought to know better. And this girl — she oughtn't to be allowed — she ought to be ——'

'I suppose you've known her for a long time?'

'I've known her long enough to wish that I didn't!' he exclaimed explosively.

'Oh,' said Elizabeth.

The tone might have warned him that she was drawing deductions. But I presume that he didn't care what she thought or what she deduced. Elizabeth was examining him with some attention. 'She's good for nothing,' said Morgan, 'except to get other people into trouble.'

'So she's like that?'

'Don't ask me what she's like! I'm not responsible for her. Only she ought to have some *sense* ——'

'It's not right,' said Elizabeth.

The man in the tweed suit seemed abruptly to regain something of his customary sarcastic superiority. He went on about Anne Martin at some length. You know the sort of thing he was in the habit of saying about her. But no one had warned Elizabeth that he was a professional woman-hater. She listened very attentively. She did not, I fancy, make much out of the sarcasm, but she made something out of his facts. And something more out of her discovery that he was so well posted in them.

Morgan went on jerking out his rather cheaply cynical summaries of Anne's character. Elizabeth seemed to stand it very well, though one would have hardly thought the subject a pleasant one. The man in the tweed suit was taking on a new aspect for her.

Elizabeth's habits of thought were uncomplicated. She was not given to refined analysis. It was obvious to her that no man could say as many things as that about a woman if he were wholly indifferent to her.

'I see,' she said. 'So naturally, it was just out of friendliness that you wrote to us.'

'Yes,' said Morgan shortly. 'And a certain surviving interest in seeing things done properly.'

'Of course. I see.' It is unlikely that she did, for Morgan, I think, must have been in a highly complex state of mind. It would have required a subtle intelligence to follow all the intricacies of his impulses, and Elizabeth was without the priceless aid of subtlety. I don't suppose that it even occurred to her that there were any intricacies to follow. She stood up against the railing. 'That's what I think, too,' she said confidentially. 'Things ought to be done properly.' And she assured herself that she had come, unexpectedly, upon an ally who could be depended upon for the reasons which generally make allies dependable.

She imagines I'm jealous, thought Morgan. It's just the silly sort of notion that a fool woman would get into her head. He sighed resignedly. And I suppose it must be a sign of shallowness when a woman comes to such obvious and simple conclusions as that.

The old lady at the other end of the porch, falling asleep, dropped her spectacle case on the floor with a rattle; a sudden horde of Smith children went into a series of acrobatic evolutions over the railings with suicide as the apparent object, and those two went on in the midst of it discussing that marvelous ex-

periment at Mackerel Ledge. 'Really,' said the girl again, 'I am glad to have somebody to talk to about all this. They wouldn't understand at home. Father wouldn't have let me come up here at all, I don't think, if he'd known what I was coming for. But it would make me ashamed to talk about it with him. So I have to do it by myself. It's nice that you feel about it just the same as I do.'

'I don't know what I feel about it,' Morgan said carelessly. 'Besides, I ought not to be wasting my time around here at all. But as long as I am here — well, anyhow, I'll let you know if I decide to go back to the city. In the meantime, you can know I'm around, if that's any comfort to you.'

'Yes, that's what I meant.'

'And you say you're not going to do anything?'

'No. *I'm* not — naturally.'

'You're not? Then who is?'

'How do I know?' said the girl.

Morgan studied her for a time. 'You know, your being here at all makes what I call a darned near impossible situation.'

'Do you think so? I suppose maybe it does.'

'Something'll have to be done by somebody.'

'I suppose maybe it will,' said Elizabeth seriously.

Morgan surveyed her as if he were not quite sure that she had understood. She lifted a grave, an ingenuous, a not very intelligent face toward his. 'There's one thing I can't make out about you,' he said slowly. 'I wish I knew, Mrs. Sigourney, whether you're everlastingly clever — or whether you aren't.'

'No,' said Elizabeth. 'Why, what makes you think so?'

'It beats me,' said Morgan, in the full light of

admiration which had slowly been growing upon him. 'You're perfect.' . . .

Perhaps she was. You see, she had simply turned her back upon them. When Elizabeth walked away toward the automobile those two had not been discussing her; neither of them, as a matter of fact, had uttered a word after Jasper had whispered his wife's name in response to Anne's query. Jasper had made a movement as if to start forward. Anne had simply tightened, ever so slightly, her touch upon his wrist; he had stopped, and she had let fall her hand. That was all. They both stood there — foolishly enough it must have been — staring at Elizabeth's narrow shoulders and at the back of her head, bent down in earnest colloquy with the driver of the automobile. What on earth could that woman have found to discuss with an automobile driver at precisely that moment? The man pointed; the girl nodded, and looked up to follow the direction of his arm. It had a curiously weird effect — all that inexplicable dumb show seen distantly in the wide air of the moor and the bright sunshine — as if she were summoning the police or doing something else mysterious and ominously practical and inimically out of place. There was some more pointing. . . . It was Anne who recovered herself first. She turned sharply and started down the path. Sigourney followed her automatically — what else could he have done? Anne never glanced at him once; but as he went on down the ravine the sense of his wife's presence up there by the gate grew more and more intolerable to him, until finally he looked full round over his shoulder. Elizabeth once more was staring at him. Being well on down the slope by that time, he could see little more of her than

her head and shoulders above the bushes. And as their eyes met across that considerable distance, the girl vanished. She disappeared. She was gone. The automobile top had already been lost to view, and so there was nothing there whatever except the bracken on the slope of the ravine, and the ragged crest-line of the hill and the empty sky — empty, impersonal, as he had seen it every day of his life since they had come to live there. It was like a visitation. He hastened to catch up with Anne.

Neither of them wanted to talk about it. But both knew that they would have to talk about it sooner or later. For a time they pretended tacitly that they did not know this; it made Jasper even more unhappy than he had been made already, but he went off about some carpentry he was doing, and Anne withdrew into the impregnable recesses of her own thoughts. It was not until they had sat down together to dinner in their little whitewashed dining-room that Anne said, quite without preliminaries, 'What do you think she wants?'

'I don't know,' he said. 'How should I know? I hadn't any idea even that she was in the North. I've had no letter from her, not since I wrote to say that I wasn't returning. She didn't even answer that one.'

'She was planning what she was going to do.'

'It's not like her. . . . Or maybe it is; I don't know. Perhaps it's a divorce she wants,' he said jerking out his words nervously. 'Evidence. That sort of thing. Stupid of her.'

'No, it's not a divorce she wants. I don't believe that.'

Sigourney agreed with a moody silence.

Anne had dropped her face onto the knuckles of her

two hands and was gazing through the window at the soft patch of sky beyond. She never looks at me, Jasper thought, when I would most like her to. . . .

Anne asked: 'Do you suppose she is spending the summer at Ocean View?'

'It's the kind of place she would stay at. But I can't guess — I don't know how she knew about us ——' He was unable to sit still. He flung his napkin down on the table, thrust back his chair, and began to wander up and down the room. Anne did not raise her head. 'What a hideous mess for you,' he was saying. 'If I'd ever dreamed she'd come here . . .'

'Don't worry about me, Jasper. It's of you I'm thinking.' As he came near to her she suddenly turned her face to his and put out her hand to arrest his nervous promenading. 'If she is staying at Ocean View,' said Anne brightly, 'we'll soon know what it's all about. It'll be time enough then.' She smiled at him. He stood close to her, dropped his arm about her shoulders.

'It hardly seems,' he said, 'as if it were real. She might have been a ghost.'

'Perhaps she was,' said Anne cheerfully. 'Don't worry. There's nothing to worry about. If there is, we'll hear of it.'

But that was just the trouble. They did not. They didn't hear anything. It might just as well have been a vision; they might just as well have imagined the whole scene — the car, the chauffeur smoking a cigarette on the running board, the woman, all of it — except that they could not both have imagined the same thing. Anne looked at the place sometimes, and saw nothing there except the road and the gate and the moor, deserted as always, in that wonderful

empty isolation which hung round them like a defense. Or was it a defense? That emptiness which they had thought so friendly seemed very huge at times, and almost ominous. And if an isolation conceals, it also blinds.

But a week or two went by, and Sigourney had uncourageously thrust the encounter out of his mind, and Anne had not thought of it, and they had pretty well closed up their beautifully fantastic world over the gap which it had made; when Breck, the foreman, remarked casually to Jasper that there was a Mrs. Sigourney 'staying up at the Cliff House,' and was she any relation, he wondered?

'No,' said Jasper, 'that is, yes. I mean — what I meant to say was that she's no blood relation. Sister-in-law.' And he stopped awkwardly. Breck as a matter of fact was thinking about something else; he had only made the remark by chance and it did not then occur to him to wonder why a sister-in-law should be on such distant terms. But Jasper felt as though he had made some kind of horrible mistake.

'She *is* staying at Ocean View,' he told Anne that evening, repeating what had passed with Breck.

For how long? They could not tell. What was she doing there, what was she saying? They had no way of knowing.

'You should have said that she was no relation of yours, Jasper.'

'I didn't like to. I hate lying — any more than can be helped.'

'So do I. But sometimes . . .'

'Besides,' said Jasper, 'I'm not good at it. And the name isn't a common one. And it wouldn't have made any difference anyway.'

'Perhaps not,' said Anne. There was a long pause.

'What a beastly thing it is!' he said suddenly. 'It puts it all the wrong way about. She hasn't any right to behave like this. It can't do her any good. I'm willing to do anything she wants, if she'll only tell me what it is, except what's impossible. But she can't go on this way. It isn't fair!'

'It isn't very pleasant at any rate,' said Anne.

'It's ghastly. Now we're being forced into lying about it . . . And evasions . . . That would be enough to spoil everything, if we have to base it on falsehoods. It makes it hateful.'

'I've been wondering, Jasper,' she said slowly. 'Perhaps you would rather I went back to the city. For a little while.'

'Went back?' He was thunderstruck. 'No, you can't do that, Anne. I couldn't stand that. What would I do?'

'Just for a time, I meant. This seems to make you so uncomfortable. It might be easier for you if I were away.'

'Truly, Anne,' he said, very solemnly, 'I don't think that I could live without you. I can't picture it. If you left me it would be — it would be awful.'

'But just for a week or two, that's all I mean, until this gets straightened out.'

'You mustn't leave me, Anne. No, you can't want to do that. You must feel it a little yourself.'

'Don't think that I want to leave you, Jasper,' was the reply she made him.

It had frightened him. Afterwards he thought of her suggestion, and wondered why she had made it, and what she had meant; but he did not ask her, be-

cause there are some things which cannot be asked in words.

At the moment, however, he tried to brush it aside. 'This won't last,' he said. 'She can't treat me this way. She hasn't any such claim upon me.'

Anne came up to him and laid both her hands on his shoulders, so that her great and lovely eyes were close to his. 'You know, I've wondered more than once whether some day you won't go back to her again, perhaps. Not now — no, I don't mean now at all, but sometime, maybe years away. You'll have forgotten all about me by that time.'

'Anne!' he exclaimed, in real pain.

'You won't *quite* forget about me, though. And I'll never quite forget about you. We'll always have the memory of this, and so we'll always be something to each other. . . . But I've often wondered whether you wouldn't go back to Elizabeth some day.'

'Can't I make you understand?' he asked her almost pitifully. 'There is absolutely nothing in the world for me except you, Anne. There never will be. How can I prove it? What do you want me to do?'

'Do?' she said. 'Why, you silly, you might put your arms around me.'

Jasper obeyed. But he did not understand. And in the meantime Elizabeth Sigourney sat upon the piazza at the Cliff House, or played tennis, or went in swimming according to the state of the tide.

And they heard nothing of her. Breck never mentioned the other Mrs. Sigourney again; and whether that was because he had forgotten about it or because he had not forgotten about it they could not tell. It made Jasper utterly wretched to be unable to discuss a detail of any sort with the man without

wondering whether he were guessing things or had guessed them. There were moments when he felt the impulse to burst out with: 'Look here, Breck, what's that woman up at the Cliff House doing? What are people saying?' It was undermining him. . . . The work, too, fell slack at about this time. They had installed the necessary apparatus, rebuilt the pier, and were ready to ship the clay. It was planned to take it in barges to New York; actually there was no kind of harbor or shelter there, but the barge could be brought round in fair weather and loaded direct from the pier, which would save transshipment costs. But the people in New York were not yet ready for it, and so on the island there was really nothing to do except to wait. Sigourney kept his catboat in the lee of the pier, although properly speaking that exposed shore was no place in which to keep a boat of any kind, and the leisure gave plenty of opportunity for afternoon sailing over placid seas. It ought to have been an unspeakable glory for both of them. But it was not. Not now. Once they quarrelled, on the beach, about nothing in particular, and came home by different routes.

And then, without warning, Casimir Morgan put in his second appearance. He simply lounged in upon them out of the middle of a heavy, muggy afternoon, and stood there between them, in his slightly disreputable tweeds, ambiguous and obvious, like a solid fact. It was something to be considered.

'Hullo,' said Jasper.

'Well,' said Anne.

Morgan rammed his hands down in the pockets of his coat and remarked that he had just run over from Ocean View, where he had come to spend a few weeks

by way of vacation. Anne caught a very queer look upon Jasper's face, and it nettled her. Jasper ought not to do that way, she thought in a flash of annoyance, though without formulating to herself precisely what was the way which Jasper ought not to do. But it was ridiculous, just because Cass Morgan came to see them, for him to allow himself to look uncomfortable. It made them all uncomfortable — that was an impossible way to do. So she immediately smiled very cheerfully upon Morgan, and asking him to sit down said that she would get some iced tea.

'Where are you staying?' Jasper asked him.

'At the Cliff House.'

'Oh.' The older and the younger man were left facing each other across the empty fireplace, from their respective chairs. Jasper played with his watch-chain. Cass folded his hands around one of his big knees and sunk his head sidewise, looking at the cold hearth.

Jasper broke the silence. 'What about it? What do you want? We're none of your business, and you know it.'

'Maybe not,' said Morgan, 'but then, nothing ever is my business.'

After that Jasper played with some keys in his pocket instead of with the watchchain. And so ultimately Anne came back and found them. . . .

The ice clinked with a bright and soulless cheeriness in the glasses; but it was a hot and heavy day, oppressing even the cool seclusion of that little white-washed retreat of theirs. But, it occurred to Anne and it occurred to Jasper, with Morgan sitting there it was no longer a seclusion. And there was a dead lift in the air — that sort of mugginess in which every-

thing all at once becomes too much trouble, and all efforts become too great. But it was Anne's characteristic to face a problem. And so it was she who faced this one, with her eyes very wide above the rim of her glass as she sipped the tea, and fastened steadily upon Morgan's shadowed face. . . .

Yes, he answered, the girl was still there at the Cliff House. 'Yes, she has asked me about you. I thought perhaps you might want to know.'

'Thanks,' said Jasper, flushing, 'but I fail to see that it is any concern of yours. I tell you, I'd rather not have our private affairs discussed all over Ocean View.'

'Not all over Ocean View. There's no talk — yet, as far as I know. As for private affairs — well, I had an idea that it was about as much Mrs. Sigourney's affair as it was yours.'

Jasper flushed still more deeply at that, but Anne merely set her glass quietly back upon the table. 'What does she want, Cass?' she asked. 'What is she doing?'

'I don't know. She's not doing anything. She's spending her summer vacation there.'

'That's ridiculous,' said Jasper.

'She must want something,' said Anne calmly. 'She can't have picked out Ocean View just as a desirable summer resort. That would be an impossible situation.'

'So I told her.'

'Well?' said the boy.

'She seconded the motion. Agreed with me.'

'What the devil . . .! But then ——?'

'Nothing.'

It brought things to rather a full stop. Morgan

stirred up the sugar in the bottom of his glass. 'She plays tennis,' he added. 'She's entered the hotel tournament.'

'But that's impossible!' the boy exclaimed.

'I don't know, though,' said Anne meditatively. 'Of course, if she really wants to come to Ocean View to play tennis . . . I wonder, does it really make any difference?'

'Well, does it?' said Morgan.

'See here, Morgan,' said Jasper hotly, 'it seems to me you've gone pretty far in this. Did she send you down here? Or are you just trying to play the little friend of all the world?'

'That won't do very much good, Jasper,' said Anne.

Jasper threw up his hands.

'I'm trying to be a little friend of ordinary common-sense,' said Morgan. 'As I get it, it's for you to say whether it makes any difference or not. If it doesn't, well and good. Then let's forget about it. But I've told you before that you've got to make up your mind.'

'I have made up my mind,' said Jasper.

'Then what do you want me to tell your wife?'

'Tell her what you like! It's none of your business and I can't talk about it. If she wants me to tell her anything, here I am. I'm not running away. She can write to me if she doesn't want to come back here. I won't burn the letters.'

'I don't mind talking to you two,' said Morgan. 'I don't mind talking to you, Jasper, because as I've said before I think what you've done is a piece of foolishness. Ordinary damn-foolishness. If you can stand it, so can everybody else. I shouldn't be sur-

prised if your wife could, too, because the things that can't be stood in this world are damn few and far between. But you've got to know *where* you're standing.'

'I do.'

'Then why don't you just tell me to go to hell and get out?'

It seemed to bring the younger man up short. He glowered at Morgan; and Morgan, slouched in his chair, looked back at him, his heavy eyebrows drawn slightly together, his eyes deep beneath, as if they were unfathomable. Jasper tossed his head in a violent, nervous gesture, and turned away. But he had not told Morgan to go to hell.

'This is of no use at all,' said Anne. 'Sit still, Jasper. I think we might put things a little straighter than they seem to be just now.'

'You can talk to him if you like,' said the boy. 'I can't stand this.' He got up. 'I'm going down to the pier. It's a little too much. . . .'

There was a long silence in the room, as if Sigourney had carried away with him their power of speech. Anne tinkled the ice in her glass; Morgan huddled himself still farther down in his chair, sunk his chin deeper upon his chest, and managed to get his string necktie awkwardly out of place beneath it. It was so still that they could hear even the gentle surge and plash of the ground-swell on the beach, and, very thin, the cry of a sea gull. 'Mew!'

'It is too muggy this afternoon,' said Anne, a little wearily. 'I can't get hold of things very well. What did you want to come here this afternoon for, Cass? You chose your time badly.'

'You'll admit I had to come?'

She nodded. 'I suppose so. Everytning unpleasant has to come some time or other.'

'You see how it is . . .'

Anne nodded once more.

'But you're being too heavy about it! Take a look at yourself. I thought it was against your principles to be serious about anything.'

'What do you know about my principles?'

'More than you seem to give me credit for.'

'I thought you were being pretty serious yourself just now.'

'Yeah, with Jasper. You believe in being light, and you're acting as if you had a ton of lead on your shoulders. Jasper believes in being ponderous, and he's acting as if he were a baby.'

'You're trying to be clever at any rate,' said Anne, 'without succeeding very well. . . . Never mind all that. I do feel serious. More than I have felt since I was a girl . . . I wish Jasper hadn't gone out. He shouldn't have done that.'

'No . . . The point is, there's likely to be a mess sooner or later. It's what I came to tell you. This girl's pretty cagey, in her own way — maybe it's because she's such a fool — I don't know. But I tell you, you're up against something. You can't just sit around being immobile. For two cents I'd get up and shake the life out of you, right now.'

'If it would amuse you . . .' said Anne. 'Do you think you can accomplish anything by shaking me? It seems to be an idea that men have — some men . . . I feel old this afternoon, terribly old. They say that women are old. It is true, I suppose.'

'Women say it!' The man exploded the sentence upon a charge of some obscure inner irritation. 'It

makes me old enough, I can tell you, to listen to it. It makes me tired. My dear girl, you were born just twenty-four years ago, and it's no use whatever pretending that you're one of Methuselah's daughters just because you happen to find yourself in a tight place. You're nothing wonderful. Snap out of it!' He stopped as abruptly as he had begun.

'And you seem rather old to me too this afternoon,' said Anne, unmoved. 'Is it just in the air, I wonder? Sometimes I used to think you the most childish elderly person I had ever met. But perhaps that was only sometimes.'

It was always a peculiarity of Morgan's that one did not know how to think of him. Sitting there with his leonine head sunk forward between his shoulders and his strong eyes enigmatically shrouded, it must have been difficult for her, I imagine, to think of him as either old or young, as either repellent or attractive, as either friend or enemy. Anne made one of her rare gestures of impatience — one of her rare protests against fact. For Morgan, whatever he was, was a fact.

'Snap out of it!' he repeated. 'It's not going to get you anywhere talking about how ancient you are. I tell you what, you're in the soup, my dear. I know you don't enjoy having that woman up there at the Cliff House; and I know you didn't enjoy having Jasper walk out on you just now. But it's a problem in relationships, more or less what any married woman has to settle sooner or later. It's getting down to the brass tacks. Only you don't happen to be married, which makes it rather worse. But you chose your own conditions.'

'Yes, I chose them. It was quite deliberate.'

'God!' said Morgan. 'What a little coward you really are, underneath. You decided to run your affairs without the help of the conventions. Oh, I know, it was all upright and an honest experiment and above-board. But you chucked the conventions. Well, you've got to take what goes with it. You don't get let off, you know.'

'I don't *want* to be let off,' said Anne in a tone of weary explanation.

'Tripe!' said Morgan. 'I know your intelligence hasn't been debauched by the movies, so you needn't talk as if it had. Everybody wants to get let off. You won't be, though.' He broke off, and his tone changed. 'Or maybe you will be. God knows. It's all accident anyhow. Maybe you're one of the lucky kind. I suppose you are . . .'

'Why don't you finish that last?'

'All right, I will. "Damn you."'

'I hope it makes you feel better. . . . No, I'm not one of the lucky kind. Do you think a lucky woman would sit here and let you talk to her in this fashion? I try to get what life has for me. But it isn't easy. Maybe it isn't easy enough.'

'Why don't you quit this?' he demanded suddenly. 'Clear out. Beat it. Follow your own theories. Live up to your own damnable ideas. Get what life has for you around the next corner. You can see that this mess is going to be a bad one.'

'If she stays up there,' said Anne, 'it will be intolerable.'

'Then quit it.'

Anne was silent for a long time. 'Mew!' said a sea gull outside the window. 'Mew, mew!' When she spoke at last it was listlessly, as if she were again ex-

plaining the obvious to a stupid intelligence. 'You know I can't possibly do that. Jasper — Jasper has devoted himself to me. You don't know what that means because you aren't a woman. But it means partly that I can't simply get up and walk out of his house. Even if I wanted to, I could not. It's just a feeling one has, in a queer way . . . I can't do that.'

'If you didn't have the courage to do a little heart-breaking now and then, what'd you ever begin for?' he asked slowly. 'Do you suppose you've made Elizabeth Sigourney particularly happy? Did you imagine you were going to make Jasper happy? But that oughtn't to bother you. Broken hearts come a damn sight too cheap on the market for any one to worry about 'em. They all get over it.'

'It's not that exactly,' said Anne.

'Well, I'll tell you one thing, anyhow. Jasper isn't going to make you happy, so you might as well act accordingly. Happiness is what you're out for, isn't it?'

Anne shook her head, turning away from him. 'I think sometimes,' she said, 'that I am incapable of happiness. I imagine that perhaps I haven't the gift for it.'

'Do you want to know what I think of that statement?'

'You can tell me if you like.'

'It's the most unutterable drivel that I ever heard a woman of your sense put into words. But it's the usual line. These profound, experienced women. I tell you, I've never met a woman yet who didn't think she'd acquired the wisdom and the sufferings of ages just because she had had the usual run of more or less stupid emotional reactions that happen to anybody

over fifteen years old and not afflicted with chronic sleeping sickness. My dear, I've studied you. My verdict is that you're a normal little girl that nobody's ever had the kindness to give a good talking to.'

Anne sat motionless in her chair, as if sunk beneath the weight of some weary depression, which yet curiously enough seemed to have no connection whatever with Morgan's words. She seemed not to have heard them. It was that quality of remoteness in her, of detachment — untouched and a little naïve. The air within the room was apparently so heavy that she scarcely breathed, but her great eyes, as always, were open and straight before her.

'I'm glad,' she said, 'to learn that it's kindness on your part, at any rate . . . I don't know why I'm talking with you like this. And I generally know why I do things. I don't know what's the matter with me.' The sunlight, lengthening through the window, had fallen with a sudden brilliance upon Morgan's shaggy and ambiguous features, so that his head and face were all sharp lights and shadows. A face capable of overmastery, of 'having an influence over people,' as Nina had said. 'Nor do I know,' she went on, 'what you have come here for, nor why it is that you are lecturing me, nor what it is that you have to do with us in any way.'

'Maybe,' said Morgan, in a tone between anger and sarcasm and mere trifling which Anne afterward found it very difficult to recall, 'it's because I'm in love with you. Most people are, aren't they? So would that be so absolutely impossible an explanation?'

'Yes,' said Anne, 'it would.'

'Q.E.D.' said Morgan, and he got up. 'I'm going. If you won't do anything, you won't, I suppose. Have it your own way, the two of you, whatever it is. But I suppose you realize one thing. This can't keep up forever. The girl won't come down here to see you. That means that sooner or later you will have to go up to Ocean View and see her. It's out of my hands.'

'Yes,' said Anne, 'I know that.'

XIII

Elizabeth Sigourney was without the aid of a subtle intelligence — although that, perhaps, is only another way of saying that she had her own method for looking calmly on life. At any rate, it was for this reason that what Anne perceived to be an obvious absurdity she could only regard as an obvious fact. When Casimir Morgan appeared abruptly upon the scene she was unequal to a penetrating analysis; 'any one could see that he's crazy about the woman,' was her mental remark, and of course it was very commonplace of her. If she had been a person of any sophistication at all she would have known that it is impossible to regard life as simply as all that — as if it were a popular novel. But perhaps that was just the trouble about Elizabeth — she had no sophistication, and she was quite capable of thinking like a popular novelist about her own and others' emotions. And novelists, to be popular, so disturbingly often have to be right.

I don't know whether Morgan was crazy or not. He very seldom gave the impression of being insane about anything. But Elizabeth, who lacked the imagination to arrive at any more subtle a conclusion, apparently had no doubts. She had so little imagination, in fact, that having made up her mind about Morgan she was willing merely to sit down and wait to see what would happen. What did happen was that Morgan continued his vacation at Ocean View. . . .

Of course, they were continually encountering each

other. She did not seem to mind talking to him about herself, although Casimir began to feel that it was curiously difficult to make much headway with her. The conversations generally seemed rather fragmentary — taking place at a casual meeting upon the beach, or in the dusk upon the piazza after dinner, when they were punctuated by the raucous sounds of the hotel phonograph, delivered up incautiously to the Smith and Jones children.

'It's all wrong of him to behave to me in this way,' she told him. 'He knows that. He knows that he's treating me badly.'

'Suppose I were to tell you that the one thing he's absolutely sure of is the cast-iron uprightness of his intentions?'

Elizabeth made a short gesture of contempt. 'Of course he thinks he's in love with her. But that doesn't really make any difference. I reckon men do that way. But don't you see, I am his wife; I just don't think he can forget that.'

'Maybe not.' Morgan nodded slowly. 'Maybe you're right. He's a queer bird. . . .'

'I don't care so much about her,' said Elizabeth, in very contained, small tones. 'At first it was pretty awful. You can't help thinking about what people say behind your back. It wasn't likely to be very much fun for me. It was terrible. . . . But maybe all that just doesn't matter very much in the end.'

'It doesn't matter as long as you don't mind it.'

'I don't mind anything,' said Elizabeth, 'except that it isn't right. There was Emmeline Parker who married Jim Hopkins — he was always carrying on with other women, and I reckon she nearly broke her heart about it. It seemed mighty funny to everybody.

But, the little fool, she knew what kind of man she was marrying. She was asking for it. It hurts to have the same thing happen to yourself. And Jasper isn't that kind of man. It isn't very decent of him.'

'You might let him explain to you how everlastingly decent he thinks it is. He's got it all worked out. He's long on explanations, you know.'

'I don't care about explanations,' said Elizabeth. 'That hasn't anything to do with it. And I reckon he knows that.'

'I wonder,' said Morgan, 'if you mind my asking one thing, Mrs. Sigourney? What do you stand to get out of it anyhow? What — well, what do you want him back for?'

Elizabeth looked at him, demurely, a trifle puzzled. 'But that's just it!' she said, unilluminatingly, and stopped.

It was not easy for Casimir to get much out of Elizabeth. She seemed a sufficiently ordinary young woman, and perhaps rather stupid. But yet he couldn't quite avoid the impression, every now and then, of a certain reserve strength in her. It made him slightly uncomfortable. She continued the usual routine of a second-rate summer hotel — tennis, swimming, *The Saturday Evening Post* and current 'summer fiction' — with what appeared to be a perfect composure. 'Do you imagine you can keep this up?' he asked her at another time.

'I 'spose I have to,' she said. 'No, I don't like it. But what can I do?'

'Go to see him. Tell him what you think of him.'

'No, I'm not going back down there. How can I do that? If he wants to see me, he knows where I am.'

'But he doesn't want to see you.'

'Not now. No.'

'But will he ever?' said Morgan bluntly.

She shrugged her shoulders.

'It beats me,' said Morgan. . . . 'What do your people think about it all?'

'I don't know what they think. I reckon they'll have to think what they want to. I can't help that.'

'Well, I guess you deserve to win out. Though what good you fancy it's going to do you is beyond me.'

'I have some pride left,' said Elizabeth.

'I've noticed that,' said Morgan. 'So I suppose you want me to go down there and tell it to him for you.'

'Oh, no,' she said, a little hastily, 'I'm not asking you for anything at all. Naturally, I reckon you'll do anything you think proper — as Jasper's friend, I mean — but of course I can't say about that . . .'

'Oh, I see,' said Morgan. 'Of course not.'

And so it was war. A war which was to be fought out in the mists and half-lights of those very shadowy territories which for lack of a better name we designate as 'personalities.' A queer battle, to be determined largely by such imponderable factors as how the contestants happened to feel at breakfast time, as whether or not it had been a hot day, as what they found themselves thinking about when they woke up in the middle of the night. The treacherous placidity of Mackerel Ledge against the incalculable strength of Ocean View's respectability. There were times when Morgan had almost decided to take his ticket back to New York. He was disturbed, I suppose, even by a purely moral tension. But he did not take his ticket — he remained there, shaggy and ambiguous.

He did not say what he thought about it; while the others must have thought about him the kind of thing which their varying mental habits would lead them to think.

Fundamentally, of course, it was a ridiculous situation, but then, all situations are ridiculous to those who aren't concerned in them. Jasper could neither meet it nor forget about it, which was silly but was very like Jasper. 'It's all come out wrong, Anne,' he told her. 'I don't know what's next — I don't know what's to be done. It all seemed plain enough sailing — but now — I don't know, maybe I'm not skillful enough . . .'

This was one evening, when they had gone down to the beach again to kindle another fire, as they had used to do, and watch the Dutch Uncle open and shut his red eye at them with his vast solemnity. But the night-herons, going off overhead, cried with a sharpened harshness; and when she spoke to him she seemed lost in the flickering light, and transformed between the darkness of the sea and the glow of the driftwood into something quite foreign to all his knowledge of her. Her answer was not what it would have been a month earlier. 'You should have let me go to the city, Jasper,' was what she said finally, 'when I suggested it. We've seen too much of each other. We can't think about things very well this way.'

And so it seemed to him once more that she wanted to abandon him, and he could not understand it. 'I can't stop you, Anne,' he said at length, 'if you want to go. But it seems to me that would just be the end of everything. It would be the finish.'

'But I don't *want* to go . . .'

He roused himself. 'There's one thing for it. We

can't play hide and seek around this ghastly island. We're just not that kind of people.'

'Does it *matter* what kind of people we are?'

'I think it does. How can one tell? It's the old question — not knowing the way things are put together. . . . But there's this about it. She won't divorce me. Well then, we can drop all this right now, to-morrow, pack up and go back to New York, take an apartment there and be open about it.'

He spoke slowly, emphatically, and left a long pause behind the words.

'We could do that . . .?' she said.

'I've done nothing I'm ashamed of,' said Jasper.

The sounds of the water and the sharp woody taste of the smoke from their beach-fire drifted in between them. 'But, Jasper,' she said, 'you never asked me to do that.'

'Because I couldn't!' he burst out. 'I can't ask you to now. Don't you see that? It's hopeless if we have to go on living like criminals. But I haven't the right to ask anything more of you. It's you who would suffer the worst of it, not me. But if you will go back to New York, then we can go to-morrow.'

In the shadows he could not see her face distinctly. But finally he heard her speaking. 'No,' she said, and then a moment later: 'It's too late now. There was a time when we might have done that. Now, it's just that you are suggesting that I be heroic. I don't think heroism gets done that way. I can't always be the one to give up everything . . .'

'Don't you think I've given up something for you, Anne?'

But she did not answer him. 'I gave you all I had,'

she said presently, and then broke off. 'The tide is coming in,' she said. 'What is there to do now?'

'My hands are bound,' said Jasper. And so they were, I suppose, bound up in the hopeless fetters of his absurd rectitude. She moved suddenly, came close to him, and laid her own hands upon his, stroking them gently. Until finally she told him, as she had so often told him before, to put his arms around her, and lay there without a word, while the fire died down into coals and the tide washed up toward her feet and the warmth of his body defended her from the growing chill. Without a word, and thinking of nothing. Until at last she freed herself from him, and sat up. 'Listen, Jasper,' she said, 'I am going away to-morrow, by myself. I'll come back — I promise you that I shall come back. Isn't that enough? But this, now, the way things are — this can't go on.'

Her words struck him like a sentence of death. He opened his lips in protest, but she stopped them with her own. 'Isn't that enough?' she repeated.

'Anne ——'

'I cannot unsay what I have said,' she told him, and the man was silent. 'I am cold here,' she said. 'Now take me home . . .'

Anne had put a blanket about her shoulders, because her nightgown was of thin silk, and the wide and star-clad darkness before which she stood had the raw touch of September in it. Vega was dipping behind one of their hills, and Orion climbed grandly above the other. Between the washing of the little waves upon their beach she heard, very faintly, the ripple from the brook, slipping secretly through the cold silences of the ravine below them. Standing there in the doorway of the cottage, with the white

blanket caught around her throat and her large eyes staring before her, she was put in sudden memory of that other night, years ago, when she had stood in the hallway of her grandmother's house, just in this way, and looked through a door. . . . 'Now you must go to sleep, dear,' her grandmother had said. 'Don't think about these things. Not now.' The words came back into her mind across what seemed an infinite gap of time. She did not want to go to sleep now. She remembered the look upon her father's face that night, and the way it had seemed when he carried her up the stairs afterward. In a strange place, in the arms of a stranger. So men were all strange, perhaps, and unaccountable; or else it was just the daily business of living that was strange, and treacherous, and so great an effort.

The stars turned, and she did not want to think — much. Because thinking was absurd. Jasper had failed her; but it was precisely this weakness in him that made him dependent upon her. So it had been with her father. She knew that she could not abandon this boy; no, that was impossible now — she did not know what he imagined that he had done for her — love isn't a matter of generosity, and he had given her nothing that she had not given him — but his helplessness laid a claim upon her. And simply to leave him, to wither that devotion which he had for her — no, it was impossible. But this situation, too, was impossible; it was almost ridiculous; it left them nowhere. 'Why didn't you *tell* me?' she thought, gazing at the stars. Why hadn't he told her that his wife might come back and that he would behave in this way? But one never is told. Why didn't you tell me? why didn't you tell me? the phrase repeated itself

automatically in her mind as phrases will, until presently she found that it had shifted into: 'Why didn't I tell him that to-morrow I am going to see his wife?' She did not know precisely why she had not told him that; she was going to New York, certainly, in the morning, but first she would stop at the Cliff House and face the problem that he seemed incapable of facing. 'You know that you will have to,' Morgan had said; and she had replied yes, that she knew that; and indeed, when that shaggy and somehow striking and repellent man had said it, she had known at once that it was the truth. She would have to.

She put her hands suddenly to her breasts, and the blanket slipped from her shoulders into a coil about her naked feet. A small figure in white, looking out from the shadows of a doorway into the immense treachery of created things. One may have one's own opinion of what Anne had done; but she must have looked, I think, lofty, untouchable, and very lovely. . . .

I don't know what answer Elizabeth Sigourney's simplicity advanced for that enigma. I don't know whether she could find it within the ambit of that stupidity which so much appeared to impress Morgan to label Anne as either a loose or a designing woman. Of Anne's great charm she could have had no doubt —it is a thing which women seem taught by experience to appreciate in a rival. Elizabeth had seen her once, on the moors, and had felt it; she felt it again as she came up the steps of that preposterous piazza, returning from a morning's walk, and found herself looking into the calm eyes of this woman, ensconced in one of the broad-armed rocking chairs, waiting for her. Elizabeth did not underrate the difficulties of her

position. She did not march into the hotel and send down word that she wasn't at home. She walked straight up to the rocking chair, with her hands clasped before her, and asked in a low voice: 'Do you want to see me?'

'Yes,' said Anne, and rose, and so these two women, or girls, faced each other in the warm September sunshine which filled up that porch with its fictitious air of placidity and respectable content. Anne saw the demure, the obviously pretty face, with its small and rather pointed chin and its brown eyes, level enough, but not free from a kind of instinctive surprise. They seemed to convey a faintly perplexed regret that the rest of the world was no better than it should be. I suppose, Anne thought, that she is a good girl; and she experienced that feeling of defenselessness which those who are convinced of their own probity always produce in those whose thoughts do not use that idiom.

'Yes,' said Anne, 'I wanted to see you. I want to talk to you. Perhaps we can go inside?'

'It's coolest in the parlor,' said Elizabeth; and Anne thought that it was precisely the sort of commonplace remark that such a woman would make — as if either of them cared whether it were cool in the parlor or not — and she perceived that from the outset she would be under the disadvantage of having to speak in a foreign language.

And on foreign territory. Anne didn't like the parlors of antiquated seaside hotels. The horsehair furniture and the absurd arrangement of sea-shells on the mantelpiece depressed her, and she felt unlike herself. Elizabeth was looking at her, slowly, appraisingly, in a hostile silence. 'I don't suppose

that we have to be polite to each other,' said Anne.

'No.'

'But I did want to talk to you,' Anne spoke slowly, with more difficulty than she had anticipated. 'You must understand that we are all simply making ourselves ridiculous. It's absolutely farcical. That's all well enough now, if you want to subject yourself to it. But really, it is too childish.'

'I suppose you think,' said Elizabeth, 'that I'd be a lot less ridiculous if I stayed home?'

'That's for you to say. I can't talk about your affairs; I have nothing to do with them.'

'Then why have you come to see me?'

'Perhaps it was foolish of me,' said Anne, 'but I hoped that we were at least intelligent people. I don't think that we have to behave like laundresses, or that we have to be cowardly about it.' Elizabeth made no answer. Anne sensed a kind of stubbornness in the silent figure opposite. 'Perhaps you will tell me,' she went on, 'what it is that you want, or what you expect . . .?'

'You know what I want.'

'You can't have it,' said Anne quietly. 'Don't you know that by this time?'

'I know that right now he's crazy about you, if that's what you mean.'

Anne shrugged her shoulders. 'I'm not talking about myself,' she said, with a trace of impatience, feeling that at all costs she must not lose control of the situation. 'Please try to understand that I haven't come here to make a scene. I only think that we might be sensible about what none of us can help. You imagine that I make any difference to you,

but it's not me. You are wanting a thing that nobody can ever have. You are dreaming, like every other woman, I suppose. Illusions. You aren't, really, even thinking about me at all. . . . But you are being rather silly.'

'I'm not especially clever,' said Elizabeth. 'You needn't expect me to know what you mean by all that. It's the truth that I don't want to think about you. But you have done a good deal to me.'

It was, Anne thought again, like speaking in a foreign language. Perhaps it was useless; she had the impulse simply to rise and go away. She actually found that she was making an effort, to retain command of herself. The girl sat there opposite to her, quite rigid, like the embodiment of a fixed idea. You cannot, Anne knew, make any impression on fixed ideas. 'Listen to me a moment,' she said at length. 'I haven't done anything to you. We can't help it if things happen so. You seem to imagine that I've come here to fight with you. But you can't fight about facts. It's impossible to recapture what has gone. But you can try to use a little common-sense about what is coming.'

'I do imagine, if you want to know it,' said the girl unexpectedly, 'that you came here to make me do some fighting.'

Anne looked sharply at her. 'I don't want to make you do anything.'

Elizabeth had dropped her own eyes to the floor. 'I suppose I could,' she said, as if she had not heard. 'Pull your hair, beat you with my fists — do things like that to you. Yes, I suppose I could. I hate you bad enough. But that's no use to me. I reckon it's what you want.'

Anne, too, perhaps began to feel that there was a certain reserve of strength in that slim and quite negligible figure. The reply surprised and shook her. 'You don't hate me,' she said, with a still greater effort. 'That's just being theatrical.'

The other raised her eyes. 'Yes, I could beat you, hard, make you hurt. You would like me to make a fool of myself, wouldn't you? Well, I'm not going to do it.'

'No,' said Anne coldly, and feeling as she spoke that the girl was driving her into vulgarity, 'you don't care for him enough to hate me.'

'You don't know how much I care for him. You don't know, and I'm not going to tell you.'

'I don't want you to tell me.'

'Yes you do.'

'I know already. You think I angled your husband away from you. I am afraid you would think that. But you are forcing me to speak plainly. You know as little about him as you know about me. You had lost him even before you had ever married him.'

'At least,' said Elizabeth, 'I did marry him. Perhaps I am as stupid as you think I am, but all the same I know what your sort is like. You've never had the courage to marry any one. Perhaps you think it's so easy that it isn't worth while. Well, it isn't.'

He ought to have saved me from this, Anne thought, dismayed by a growing sense of helplessness. 'I don't believe it is much use talking in this way,' she said. 'If you insist on playing the injured wife, I have nothing more to say. I had hoped that you would be willing to face the situation a little more realistically.'

'It looks to me as if I was facing it.'

'Perhaps you are trying to work on my sympathies. As if I thought for an instant that I had injured you. I can't answer that sort of silliness. People do not injure one another, not in that way; you are responsible for yourself. I was trying to save us all from any more unpleasantness than could be helped. It is of no use.' She spoke coldly, against a wretched sense of distaste for the whole episode. She had not expected this. It had been a mistake to come at all.

'No,' said the other, 'it's no use talking this way. You are right. But you won't save yourself from any unpleasantness. You see, he's my husband. I married him. You don't know why, and I 'spose you never will. I hope you won't, anyhow; that will make you suffer some.'

'Please ——'

'And you don't know how much I care for him. That will make you suffer some more, I reckon. I can see you're a lot cleverer than I am. I don't know whether you are clever enough to get around that.'

'If you imagine you are so fond of him,' said Anne desperately, 'it seems to me that you might have shown it.' And she was shocked to find that she was saying it, knowing it to be puerile, and utterly unlike herself.

'Have you?' said the girl.

'I haven't driven him away from me. And I haven't sat down to enjoy myself in a summer hotel while I was waiting for him to come back.'

'I don't run after men,' said Elizabeth. 'Not even my husband.'

It was ghastly. What is the matter with me? Anne thought. Why can't I stop her? She wondered how she had brought herself into so intolerable a

situation. All at once she knew that there was something in this girl which was conquering her. He ought not to have exposed her to this; he would tell her that his hands were tied, but now her own hands were tied. She experienced an abrupt, almost physical sickness, and a sense of infinite disgust.

'I won't tell you those things,' the contained voice had begun once more, 'because I want to hurt you; I think you ought to be hurt. And I know it will hurt you, because you don't know what he means to me, and you want to know it. You came here to find out.'

'It's useless to go on. We aren't talking about the same things.' It had been a terrible mistake. Anne's own voice was on the verge of trembling.

'Maybe not. You see, he is my husband, and he isn't yours. So we can't be talking about the same things. But before you go there is one thing that I will tell you. I'll tell you what I want. I want you to stop living with him. It's not decent.'

Anne had got to her feet by this time. He should not have brought me into this, she thought, clutching her bag so hard that she broke its strap, he *should* not. She caught her lip between her teeth, 'Really, there is nothing more to say.' She knew that she could not stay in the room any longer; after this, she could not stay anywhere upon that island. It had suddenly become unbearable to her, the very thought of it. She could not abandon Jasper, no, but she could not endure this. She found that she was fighting down a desire to run, headlong, anywhere. She had stood things too long. It was intolerable, intolerable. . . .

'No,' Elizabeth was declaring, in a flat tone, 'there

is nothing more to say.' The girl got up, nodded her head formally at her, and went through the door. And Anne stood there, struggling with the revulsion within her, in the midst of that ridiculous room, with her great eyes staring at the empty door-frame and the floor-boards beyond. . . .

And then it was that something rather curious seems to have happened. You can make your own guess as to what it was, and I suppose you will be as wise as any one. She was standing there, I know, fighting hard with this impulse to run, and feeling like a woman caught fairly in a trap. A trap whose meshes were so subtle that she could not even see where they lay, but which held her so closely that she was stifling in it. Something was the matter with her. There had never been anything in her life which she had not been able to meet, calmly, against the background of her own experience and her own convictions. She had never before, I suppose, been betrayed by herself. She could not abandon Jasper; especially after what had just happened she could not do it, and at the same time she felt that it would be a physical impossibility for her to go back to Mackerel Ledge. She wanted, bitterly, an escape. I know this much: that she was standing there, wanting an escape, and feeling that no escape was possible. And then she found that Casimir Morgan was lounging into the room through the doorway. . . .

'Well,' he said, and stopped, one hand in the pocket of his shapeless tweed coat — long, powerfully-framed, with that always rather distinguished head of his turned intently upon her. 'Well, what the devil!'

Anne seems to have felt suddenly that she could

not face this. She could not row with Cass Morgan just then. She took several steps toward the door — straight at him, as he was standing just within it — stepping faster as she crossed the floor, and more unsteadily. 'Get out of the way, please,' she said.

'But wait a *minute*,' said Morgan. 'You've been crying.' As she came up to him he saw, in fact, that her eyes were wet.

'No,' said Anne, 'I haven't been crying. But I am about to, I think.' He did not move; it brought her perforce to a halt, swaying a little, looking up at him, hard. . . .

'Now just a second ——' Morgan began.

'*Don't!*' said Anne, and wavering, absolutely collapsed into a chair — one of the porch rockers, it was, with the broad arms, which some one must have brought into the parlor the last time there had been rain. Anne dropped both her own arms on the wide, flat piece of wood, her head upon them, and sobbed with an intense, compressed bitterness that seemed as if it would tear her in two.

Anne was never known to cry. Morgan took his hand out of the pocket of his coat, and then put it back again. 'But look here,' he said, 'you can't do this way, you know. This isn't the weeping-room.' He withdrew his hand once more; it wandered vaguely in the air for a moment, and ended by giving a pull at his collar which set it somewhat more askew than it had been before.

'Oh, Cass,' he thought he heard her say, 'I simply can't go on any farther. I can't bear it.'

'Bosh,' said Morgan. 'What's she done to you?' And he finally put his hand, gently, upon her shoulder. She seemed to tremble a little under it.

'It's not her,' Anne sobbed out. 'It's — it's everything. It's myself. This is foolish. I can't help it. I just can't help it. I'm going, I think.'

'Meaning where?' asked Morgan, trying to soothe her a little under his sufficiently awkward touch.

'Away. Now.' She wriggled herself erect in the chair. The sobbing ceased abruptly. 'I can't stay here.'

The other looked narrowly down upon her. 'You've lost your nerve.'

'Yes, I have. Get away, please.'

'What about Jasper?'

'I don't know,' she said, a little wildly; and then she suddenly jumped out of the chair, absolutely jumped out of it, and made one bolt for the doorway.

She was almost too quick for him; he just caught her by the wrist, and his effort in seizing her swung her full around, so that she found herself struggling furiously, in his arms. 'Hold on, hold on,' he said. 'Take it easy. Tell me about it first.'

But he had to use both his arms to keep her. 'There isn't anything to tell,' she said, her voice breaking once more, 'let me go.'

He would not let her go. 'Look out,' she heard him saying, 'you'll have the whole rotten crowd in here in a minute. Have a little sense.' She did not care whether the rotten crowd came in or not. She did not want to have any sense. She made a last effort to free herself. But he was holding her powerfully, very tightly with one arm, trying to get hold of her hands with the other. All at once she let him; and then she realized that she was crying, unrestrainedly this time, into that tweed jacket. And she seemed to have become limp. 'But look here,' she heard him say, 'I

can't just drop you on the floor, you know. Stand up!' Instead, she looked up, into his face, and found that this fine face, with its penetrating eyes, looked utterly different to her than it had ever looked before. . . .

'Very well,' she said quietly, and stood away from him.

'Well, that's better,' said the man. 'What's got into you, anyway? I wouldn't have thought this of you. Now, what the hell's the matter?'

'Just a minute,' said Anne, and there was something of a pause. 'Nothing,' she said, 'or everything.'

'Found you couldn't stand the gaff?'

'No, I couldn't stand the gaff. It was too much. I am afraid it is all over — Jasper, I mean, and myself.'

There was an odd look on his face. 'Oh, it's all over, is it? What do you think about that?'

'I've stopped thinking,' said Anne, 'if it's me you mean. I shall have to go back again to Mackerel Ledge, I suppose, because I promised him that I would do that. But it's all over — quite. . . . Can you get me a room here, Cass? I don't mean this hotel — somewhere else — I'll have to go back there because I promised, so I'll have to stay here to-night. I can get the boat to-morrow or next day.'

'There're plenty of rooms,' said Cass, and then paused. 'It seems to me there's something funny about all this.'

She looked up at him through grave eyes, quite composed by this time. 'Yes,' she said, 'I think there is. Something very funny.' And she gave a short laugh that was not, I imagine, particularly pleasant.

Morgan put both his hands in his pockets, stared

at her for a moment in a puzzled way, and then shrugged his shoulders. 'All right,' he said. 'I guess you might as well wait here until I can find you a place to stay.'

XIV

Something *was* the matter with Anne Martin. For, in that moment by the doorway, she had made a discovery. She had discovered that she was in love. As abruptly, as unexpectedly as that. She had discovered that she was in love with Casimir Morgan.

It had simply come over her, in a flash of appalling misery. Such a thought had never entered her head before. And even then, I suppose, with her feminine powers of self-deception she did not at once admit it to herself. No; she watched Morgan, very steadily, as he went out of the room, and then merely fell back into a chair, trembling violently through her whole body, too shaken to think, overwhelmed by the force of this fresh and unexpected catastrophe. For it was a catastrophe. She knew that something had happened to her which had never happened before in her life. It was obscure, inexplicable and enormous — she could not even ask herself what it was. But it had seized upon her, taken possession of her, and destroyed her. There was nothing left, nothing left at all except a kind of terror at the blank emptiness which this discovery opened in her life. In a single instant it had changed everything . . .

Cass Morgan, in the mean time, passed down the uncarpeted hall, on his way to find a place for her to stay the night.

In the lobby he encountered Elizabeth Sigourney, turning over the pages of *The Saturday Evening Post*.

'You win,' he said grimly.

'What does that mean?' asked the girl.

'I wish I knew. And I wish I knew what it was you've been doing to her in there.'

'Nothing,' said Elizabeth.

'Women are such infernal brutes,' said Morgan savagely. 'She tells me she's clearing out. Yes, it's for good.' He had to raise his voice slightly; the denizens of the Cliff House were coming home for luncheon, trailing tennis rackets, wet bathing suits and the inanities of seaside conversation through the lobby, so that there was considerable noise. 'She's going. I guess you can have what's left.'

'She didn't tell me so.'

'She told me. And she means it. There's no mistake about that.'

Elizabeth continued to turn over the pages of *The Saturday Evening Post*. His announcement seemed to have no effect upon her; but there was a certain added intensity in the demureness of her downcast gaze.

'I hope you're satisfied,' he said.

'Yes,' she said at length, studying an advertisement of bath-tubs, 'yes, I'm satisfied.'

The impression of rather dull respectability which she managed to convey suddenly struck him as verging upon idiocy. 'I'd like to know why,' he said angrily, 'I'd like to know what good it's going to do you!'

'It wasn't right,' she said. 'I wanted them to see that it wasn't right.'

'Right!' he exclaimed irrationally, 'what difference does that make? Why couldn't you leave them alone?'

Elizabeth looked up at him in some surprise. 'Of course I could have left them alone if I had wanted to,' she said with an irritating literalness. 'But I

wasn't going to do that.' She saw that her ally was scowling at her. 'Aren't you satisfied?'

'Me? What have I got to do with it?' he snapped at her. 'It's a disgusting mess. You'd think people might act like human beings once in a while.'

This anger disturbed Jasper Sigourney's wife. To her it was inexplicable. 'They ought to act decently,' was what she found to answer.

'Yes,' he said sarcastically, 'and so you win.'

Elizabeth compressed her lips and made no reply. Morgan gazed for a moment at that singular triumph, and gave it up. He nodded toward the parlor. 'She's in there now. You'd better make yourself scarce until she leaves. Understand?'

'Yes,' said Elizabeth Sigourney. His manner may have perplexed her. But if so, she disregarded it. For after all, she had her victory — whatever it was. . . .

In the parlor, Anne was facing what seemed to her an abrupt and underhanded defeat. She did not attempt to leave the room; she did not even move once from her chair. They were having fried fish for lunch, she perceived, as both the sounds and the smells from the dining-room permeated the hotel. Afterward, she realized that lunch was over. Still later, a couple of the lesser Smith (or Jones) children wandered into the parlor in search of excitement. She smiled at them and held out her hand. But they went away. She sat there, and allowed time to elapse, until ultimately Morgan returned and told her that he had engaged a room for her elsewhere. She arose immediately, and went with him quite calmly, thanking him when they reached their destination with a grave composure. She said that she would let him know before she left. She had ceased to think about things,

It was during that night that there came on a run of easterly weather. Anne, awake at four o'clock in the morning in the strange room, was conscious of curtains slatting with the wind, and rain driving fitfully on the window-ledge. In the morning it was a gray, damp world, with a kind of leaden chillness in it, very different from the day before; and the first of the fallen leaves scurried now and then across the 'back yard' upon which her room looked out. The sea in its cold, salt, deadly mood seemed to have got into the sky and into the streets, touching them with its wildness, and she had to move quickly through her dressing to keep warm. It was a mood which suited her own. For she knew, without admitting it, that everything was changed; and she slipped into her underclothes with the dulled sense that everything was lost. But it was not until she was brushing her hair that she abruptly brought herself to recognize what seemed to her the facts and to call them by name. For it was then she perceived that the tall, the slightly awkward figure of Casimir Morgan had filled up the whole of her mind, the profoundest recesses of her spirit. She had been transformed, it seemed, into an aching and unappeasable want, a want to which she could not confess and which she could not hope to satisfy.

I do not pretend to understand this. Anne, I think, did not understand it; but so it was. She belonged to him. She did not know why, she knew only that it was the fact. In the pain and excitement of it, she could scarcely get her hair arranged; and then when she had done so she simply sat down, in the loneliness which this seemed to mean for her, incapable of action. She had nothing to eat that morn-

ing — it did not occur to her. When the maid rapped on the door, wishing to make up the room, Anne went out for a walk. The rain drove occasionally across the sandhills below the town, and for a time she stood and watched some sheep in a corner of a field behind the dunes huddled stoically against the wet. Sometimes she tried to think of everything that Morgan had ever said to her, or that she had ever said to him, and found that she could remember almost nothing. Sometimes it was merely a wonder as to what could have been the springs of this sudden and intolerable desire. There was no joy in it — she did not think of it as a desire which could ever be fulfilled — she thought of it only as a calamity. And then for a while she watched the grasses bending over the dunes. And then she wondered a little as to what kind of man he might actually be, not that it mattered at all, because nothing mattered now. Nothing would make any difference now; nothing could. And then she found that she was crying; and rather dully she was surprised, for she knew that she was not the kind which cries.

And she did not think of Jasper at all, not once, until she was coming back to the hotel. She came back because her clothes were beginning to be wet through, and it was absurd to walk around in the wet. But then she thought of him. Yes, all that was over now, quite, as she had said to Morgan. She supposed that she would have to return to Mackerel Ledge, in order to tell him; it would not be especially easy, and she would have preferred some other way, but she had promised, and so she had no option. And anyway, did it matter very much? It was merely a question of telling him, and then *that* would be over. She did not

appear to remember that only the day before such a thing had seemed impossible to her. Yes, she would tell him, and then that, at least, would be over. . . .

A taxicab carried her over to the ravine the same afternoon. It was a bad trip. The roads were heavily muddied in the low spots; there was no longer rain, but the wind appeared to be rising over the moors, with moments of an almost fantastic violence against those bare hills which it could not hurt; the clouds were low, and Anne, sitting stiffly in the rocking cab, felt the dreary dampness and the hostility of the cold. It occurred to her to wonder, at times, just what she would say to Jasper, but for the most part her thoughts were of her own life, of the strangeness of this thing which had overtaken her, or of the weary difficulty of waiting until it should eventuate in some issue. It gave her a steady pain, like a wounded nerve. She would see Morgan to-morrow; yes, she would see him to-morrow, certainly, but what was that? To see a person across an abyss of words. . . . She was beyond that sort of thing — seeing or not seeing, that was mere childishness. This was something much older, much more deeply buried in the springs of meaning. The awkward and ambiguous figure had become a necessity for her; without him she was less than nothing, for she was an aching incompleteness, and yet at the same time it was an incompleteness with which the man, perhaps, had very little to do. As if he were only an incident. . . .

And Jasper? Yes, she would have to see Jasper, she supposed. The automobile lurched to an abrupt halt by the gate, looking down into their ravine. Anne got out and paid the man, automatically, and it was not until she had started down the path that it occurred

to her that she would want the car to go back in. But it was too late then to recall him. She went on down the ravine — damp and muddied and unfamiliarly gray under the low skies, with the gusts of wind tumbling through it — and coming down by the cottage she noticed the rollers flinging themselves up on the beach, bigger and louder than she had ever noticed them before. She went into the house. No one was there. The brasses that she had put by their old-fashioned fireplace winked at her through the dusk; the cover of the last issue of *The Theater Magazine* — Jasper had been careful to subscribe to it on her behalf — made a dim spot of color somewhere on the table. She sat down in the twilight to wait for him. The place was full, of course, of knickknacks — things — which they had woven into the texture of their life together. She could only half see them, or not see them at all, but she sensed their crowding presence all about her, and she thought that perhaps it was a pity that it had all passed so completely and was gone now, and quite dead. But so it was. It was nothing which she could alter; it had passed, and though she might even wish to revive it, because this new existence had nothing but pain in it, she was powerless.

She heard him slam the door and drop off a wet raincoat. 'Jasper,' she said.

'Anne!' He advanced through the obscurity of the room. 'So you're back again. Gosh, I am glad.' She was sitting with her legs tucked under her, in the big chair they had established against the wall, looking straight before her as he approached. 'But what're you sitting here in the dark for? I can hardly see you.'

She smiled at him, a little soberly, perhaps, but yet with that amazing sweetness which seemed to the man to express, more than anything else, all that she was. Why did she smile at him? Heaven only knows.

He kissed her, and she let him do so, without response. 'Sorry I wasn't here,' he said, 'to receive you appropriately. I was down looking at the boat. She wanted extra mooring; it's been blowing up considerably since this afternoon.'

Anne said nothing at all. The man paused, straightened up. 'Let me get a light going,' he said with a touch of anxiety, 'you don't want to sit here in the dark.'

'Never mind the lights, Jasper.'

'Is there something the matter?' he asked. I don't suppose, Anne thought, that I can ever explain to him what the matter is. No, I don't suppose that I can. 'Anne!' he said sharply, 'what is it?' As the darkness gathered in the room her face seemed to fade slowly from him. But he saw that she had dropped her eyes. He stepped to her side. 'What is it?' he repeated. 'Tell me what it is, Anne. Your going away like that sort of got me. I've been thinking all the ghastliest things since you left. Of course I know it's silly of me — now that you're back again. But I couldn't help it. Tell me it's all right.'

There was a growing strain in the voice. Anne felt a weary temptation to put off the task. 'You must understand, Jasper ——' she said, and stopped. She found the effort of speaking greater than she had looked for.

'Don't say that there's anything wrong. Nothing's happened to you?' He had caught her hands; he

seemed about to put his arm around her. She slipped from his grasp.

'No. I'm all right.'

'But Anne ——'

She felt that she was being stupid, cowardly perhaps. And she faced him squarely, summoning her instinctive courage. 'Jasper,' she said, 'try to understand what I am about to say. You must forgive me for it. It is all over between us, Jasper; there is nothing more for us, nothing more at all . . .'

There was a part of her mind which seemed to be detached, standing aside and watching this scene between the man and the woman — this woman who happened to be herself. And it was with this detached section of her consciousness that she thought: It is exactly as if I had killed him. I suppose if you shot a man he might seem that way, just before he fell.

Jasper did not fall. He was very shadowy there before her, shadowy and quite unreal. The shadow appeared to be speaking. 'You don't mean that you are leaving me?'

'Yes,' she heard herself say. 'I can't help it, Jasper. It just had to be this way I suppose. I can't explain it. But it is all over.'

He had caught her again, convulsively. 'Anne! You don't know what you are saying! You are out of your mind. This can't be true. You can't mean it!' Perhaps he went on saying other things; she really did not know. It seemed to her that for a long time nothing had happened. Until she was speaking again:

'It is true, Jasper. I can't explain it to you. You must not ask me.'

'You'll have to explain it to me,' he said fiercely.

'Do you expect me just to believe this? I love you, Anne.'

That disconnected part of her mind went on observing them, both of them, and thinking that this was an insane sort of performance, all wrong, childish, with something almost theatrical about it. Real people did not behave in this way. She found that he was shaking her.

Presently he stopped that. 'You don't mean it,' he said. 'You're upset. This business about my wife has been too much for you. But you don't mean it. To-morrow you won't feel this way.'

'It hasn't anything to do with your wife, Jasper. I wasn't even thinking about her.'

'What is it then? . . . It must be that.'

She knew wearily that she could not make him understand. 'Nothing,' she said. 'I can't tell you.'

'You must tell me.'

'I don't understand it myself, Jasper. But — but there is another man. I care for some one else. I can't help it . . .'

He stared at her. He did not believe her. He was incapable of believing her. 'That's impossible!' he exclaimed. She shook her head. His voice assailed her suddenly in waves — waves against which she had to stiffen herself, calling upon her strength. He could not believe that. He implored her, shook her. She had to tell him yes, that it was the truth, over and over again. That she did not know how such a thing should have happened to her, but that it was the truth. In that little house, with the wind going mournfully about the corners, the sounds of those two voices, going on and on, question and answer, must have been indescribably monotonous and, I think,

pretty dreadful. She had to cling to this fact, which she could not explain, while his voice beat upon her. . . .

Suddenly he stopped. He did believe her.

'But such things don't happen that *way*,' he said at length. 'You are just imagining that you are in love with him. To-morrow it will be different.'

'I shan't be here to-morrow,' she told him. 'I shan't stay here to-night. I can't, now.'

'You'll have to.'

'You are not making it very easy for me, Jasper,' she said.

'Easy for you!'

'Don't you see how terribly hard it is for me? . . . You see, I love him.'

It appalled him. There was a long silence. She was in love with him. It was the truth then.

'Then I mean nothing to you at all,' he said finally, in a low voice.

'You mean a great deal to me, Jasper. You always will. But this other has just happened. It is something different, Jasper. I didn't know there was anything like this in the world before.'

'Anne, I've given you everything that I had, everything that was in me. You can't be so cruel now . . .'

But that has nothing to do with it, Anne was thinking. Ideas of that sort are without meaning. 'You can't love people because you ought to, Jasper. Love isn't a question of that kind. I hope you will not think too bitterly of me. You must forgive me if you can. It's just the way things are.'

'No,' he exclaimed. 'Things are what you want them to be. You're not an automaton. I love you because I want to.'

'Maybe that,' said Anne impersonally, as if it were a point of no consequence, 'is why all this has happened.'

He could get no response from her will. She was inert, like a dead weight. 'There must be some reason for it!' he insisted. 'It is my wife — I know. It's been too much for you, of course. Never mind. We'll get out of this place at once. Go to New York.'

'You told me that you couldn't ask me to do that.'

'I'm not asking you. You must go. We'll leave to-morrow.'

She shook her head. 'I shan't be here to-morrow.' He did not reply. 'Maybe once that would have been all right,' she said after a time. 'Sometimes you can take things that you can't have by asking for them. But you would never understand that.'

'You'll have to come with me.'

'It is too late now,' she said wearily. 'And I don't suppose anyway that it would have made any difference. There's a fate about it.... It's not your fault, Jasper. Nor is it mine. It's nobody's fault.'

He was holding her roughly by both shoulders. 'I'll make you come.'

She smiled at him. 'Yes,' she said, 'you could do that, I suppose — if you want to.'

He dropped her abruptly, and she made out that he was in the center of the room, fumbling for a match-box. There was a blinding point of flame, which went out; he broke a second match, and with the third got a candle alight — a bayberry candle, standing in a tall brass candlestick which she remembered their having bought together in one of the Allen Street shops one morning, a long time ago. He came close to her again, holding up the candle so that he

could look into her face, and he saw that she was not looking at him at all, but through or beyond him, and he must then have realized at last that she had escaped him, indeed, and forever. He might force her to go where he liked, but he could never take her with him. He carried the candle back to the table. 'You look like a stranger,' he said hopelessly.

'I am a stranger, I think,' she said with the smile seemingly fixed upon her face. 'I suppose this is the first time that I ever knew my real self. I feel that way. The me that you knew is quite dead, Jasper.'

'You are not even sorry.'

'I am sorry. She was very happy with you. I remember when we bought that candlestick . . .'

'Good God, Anne!'

'I'll always like to remember things like that. There will be something happy to think of, at any rate.'

'You're driving me crazy!' he exclaimed. 'It's all so impossible! This other thing, you say, is not making you happy. What's it for? You were happy enough with me . . .'

'But that has nothing to do with it,' she repeated. The thing was becoming terribly wearisome for her. She did not want to think about Jasper. She felt herself so wholly a different person now that she could hardly speak with him. And it was all so simple, so obvious. To sit there, repeating these obvious facts, when she wished to be thinking about something else — it was appallingly difficult. 'You might spare me a little. Let me go now.'

He would not let her go. 'Then it must have been my fault,' he said. 'I must have let you down somewhere. Tell me what I've done. Anything you say, if

you'll only tell me. We can begin over again. If you'll only want to. I'll do anything . . .'

She shook her head. 'It's not that at all.'

'But it must have been something I've done to you.'

The argument wandered on, uselessly. For half an hour maybe. The same things, over and over again.

'I'll go with you,' she said at length, 'if you like. But you wouldn't want it that way. Can't you see it?'

The boy was silent.

'You had better let me go. And don't think too badly of me. I shall suffer enough, if that's any consolation.'

'Consolation! I don't want you to suffer.'

'Then don't ask me to stay here any longer.'

He sat down away from her, by the table, and sunk his head in his hands.

Anne saw him do this. Or that detached fragment of her mind saw it, and noted that when men were unhappy they seemed incapable of action. But that had very little to do with her. She was lost in her own thoughts. The bent figure melted, like a piece of furniture, into the background of her consciousness. And the minutes wore slowly away and a gust of wind passing outside tried the windows. And at length he lifted his head from the depths into which he had sunk and said quietly: 'Tell me at any rate how I've failed you.'

'But you haven't. Not at all. In no way. You were finer to me than I thought any man ever could be.'

He seemed on the point of speaking. But all this has gone on too long, Anne thought. 'Please don't,

Jasper. You must try to understand this much: it is not of my will. I shall think badly enough of myself on your account as it is. Perhaps it would have been better if we had never known each other. But the memory will always be beautiful. And that is all we can ever ask for. So please let me go now.'

'I shall kill myself,' he said in a low voice. She did not respond. He looked up at her. Her eyes were vaguely away from him, filled with an unreadable significance. Anne, as a matter of fact, had not heard; or if she had heard, her mind had failed to translate the words into their meaning. But Jasper, of course, did not know this. . . .

She perceived that he was standing up, turned sidewise to her, at the other end of the room. 'You can't go away now,' he was saying. 'There's no machine. There's no way for you to get over to town.'

'I'll walk.'

'Ten miles! And the weather like this.'

'I'll walk,' said Anne. 'I can't stay in this house to-night.'

He went away. She heard him making noises in the next room, which conveyed nothing to her. She shivered and drew her cloak about her shoulders. Presently he was back again, wearing a slicker and with another — she recognized it as a small yellow one of her own — over his arm. She looked a question.

'I shall have to go with you,' said the man levelly. 'You'd better put this on.'

'You mustn't. I'd rather sleep on the moor.' The tone was absolutely decided. 'Open air won't kill me, not now. I am going alone, Jasper. We shall not see each other again.'

He stared down at her for quite a time. At length he began again, in a matter-of-fact way. 'There'll be a car of some sort over at Slipwicket,' he said, dropping the yellow slicker on the table. 'You stay here. I am going to get it for you.'

'There isn't any road from here,' said Anne, 'except along the beach or else all the way back through the cross-roads.'

'No. And the beach won't be much good to-night; there's too much surf on Knob Point. I am going in the boat.'

'Isn't it dangerous?'

'Of course not,' he said shortly, and stood looking at her for a long, long time.

'Thank you, Jasper,' she said.

'It's the least I can do for you, I suppose,' said the boy. When she looked up again the room was empty. The wind went round the house in a gust, and as it passed Anne heard the surf roar upon the beach not far away. They were fairly in the grip of a nor'easter. But Anne knew nothing about such things. She sat motionless in her chair, lost in her own thoughts. She had already forgotten him.

A blast from the gale, eddying into their ravine, caught Sigourney by the throat as he left the door, so that he had to throw all his weight against it, and then it dropped him, so that he very nearly fell. He found himself in a ravine converted into a strange and treacherous darkness, as he had never known it before. The surf was booming more loudly than he had supposed, and over on that side he caught now and then the sudden gray shadow upon the obscurity which breaking waves make at nighttime. The ravine — it was out of the direct force of the wind and was

only invaded from time to time by sudden onslaughts — was full of running whispers, or momentary faint shoutings, of lurking, unforeseeable violences. It was a confusion, like the wild hurry of his own thoughts, and it suited them.

He stumbled down the path toward the pier, meeting the violence of the weather with an inner violence of his own — cursing furiously every time the wind took him, kicking in an insane fashion at the unseen obstacles he encountered underfoot. Literally insane, because I suppose that he was about as near to insanity as a normal, reasonably healthy young man is ever likely to come. At that moment he seems not even to have thought about Anne. He couldn't think about her, not just then; he got around the bluff where the gale flung itself more furiously upon him, and more furiously he answered it with his own wildness, trying to exhaust the turmoil which she had created within him by a senseless battle with this idiotic rage all about. It suited his mood; it even helped to create it, perhaps, because I suppose that it would have been a very different matter if he had walked out of that house in the placidity of a summer night. The nor'easter, coming just at that time, was a matter of accident, like so much else in experience. It happened that way.

He got on to the pier, really with no great difficulty, but working himself up as he went on, until that scramble along the planking had as much of ferocity about it as if he had been fighting the wildest hurricane that ever blew. He reached the point where the catboat was made fast with an extra hawser. All that part of the shore, as a matter of fact, was fairly well sheltered, for the wind was pretty far round to

the northward. But it was blowing hard, and was lively enough, even under the partial lee of the land. He saw that he could go off on a free sheet — there wouldn't be very much trouble about that; quite the contrary, he would probably go too fast if anything, and the job would be to keep her from broaching to and swamping once he got clear of the shore.

He made these reflections in a mechanical way. 'Lucky for the pier,' he even thought professionally. 'If it was more to the eastward there'd be a new pier to build in the morning.' The catboat was bobbing about beneath him with an active unhappiness as it was, but he dropped accurately into her and began tearing off the sail-cover. A wave came up and slapped against the piles of the wharf; the spray flew into his face, or a spatter of rain, he didn't know which; the clouds raced above him, and he went on fumbling after wet ropes, knotting reef points, fighting with the sail, doing it fiercely but as it were mechanically — with all the while a vague sense that there was something else about this — he had had another idea when he came out — but what the hell damned difference — he was going somewhere — but damn it, *that* earring ought to hold now. . . .

Yes, it was a wild and grotesque performance. A Cape cat in experienced hands is, as a matter of fact, an extremely able seaboat; and over a question of life or death it would not have been an unwarrantedly reckless proceeding to take one out even in that wind. But she would want capable handling — and it ought to be a question of life or death. Sigourney knew that he was no better in a catboat than any other average summertime sailor. Yes, he knew that. But he got up the peak of the sail, stopping the rest down

to the boom and lashing the boom firmly in its crotch with the mainsheet, and then, as the wind howled down upon him, he cast her off.

The wind filled up the rag of sail with a slap that he thought would carry away the earring, but the line held; the boat slipped free from the wharf, and Sigourney, bare-headed, fighting the tiller with both hands, and with one foot braced up against the bench opposite, gritted his teeth and laughed — a laugh that in its tiny way might have sounded like the exultant, malicious yell of the gale itself. And then a wave lifted up under his stern, the catboat ran forward with the water boiling about the rudder-post and Jasper, turning his eyes ahead, saw the red light on Mackerel Ledge wink, and come on again. 'The Dutch Uncle,' he exclaimed; and his boat, gathering herself, shot on.

XV

Time flowed past. Once Anne got up, gathered the yellow slicker from the table and put it about her shoulders, over her coat, and then resumed her position, curled up immobile in the big chair. Even then she did not think of the boy who had brought the garment into the room for her. She had forgotten him, forgotten all about him; and so she was alone there, absolutely alone, in the tormented silences of that house assaulted by the gale. The candle burned on, shorter and shorter, leaving its faint incense in the room, and at long intervals Anne's delicate fingers clenched themselves, as if of their own motion, hard, and then relaxed. For that was useless — all that sort of thing — and she was left staring with dry eyes at this contemptible trick which chance, accident, life had played her.

Would Cass Morgan ever come to feel for her a fraction of this stupid wretchedness which she felt because of him? One could not know. A woman had to wait until she was told. She felt a kind of degradation in it — that she could so far have lost the control of her own spirit — but that was silly, because this was nothing to which one could apply senseless words with ethical tags. It was an attack from within the citadel, which had treacherously destroyed her. That was not her fault; and yet it could mean nothing for her except pain and unhappiness. It seemed a grotesque end to arrive at through doing only what she had thought right and possible. It was not Anne's habit to use ethical terms. 'Right' had for her a more

pagan significance than we ordinarily attach to the word. It was the integrity, rather than the morality, of her life in which she was interested; and that may come to the same thing or it may be something a little finer, but here, at any rate, it had been touched by the finger of passion and had been laid in ruins. And so she sat there, forgetting what the time was, forgetting even to wonder whether a car actually were coming for her or not, forgetting everything except what seemed to her the essential stupid cruelty of existence.

The candle guttered out. She let it go, for a time, and sat in darkness; but then it seemed to her that there were too many noises creeping along the walls outside, and so she rose and lit another one. And then it occurred to her that she wanted something to eat, and it was while she was pausing to think what there might be in the pantry that she became aware that there was some one at the door. So then she remembered about Jasper, and went to the door and opened it, and found that Casimir Morgan was standing there, with a long raincoat of some sort blowing about his thin legs. The man himself, as a matter of fact, was almost blown into her arms; between them they got the door shut, and then, standing in the abrupt darkness (the candle of course had been whisked out) Anne discovered that she was stiff and intense all over, suddenly terribly alert, her mind working rapidly and that lassitude which had overcome her as she had been talking with Jasper quite gone.

There was some more business with matches and the candle. 'Hope you don't mind my dropping in on you this time of night,' said Morgan, bending over the table with his back to her so that the flare of the

match-head constructed a grotesque silhouette of him upon the wall.

'I don't even know what time it is,' Anne replied.

'Past midnight I should think. Good Lord! it's nearly one o'clock. Where's Jasper?'

'I don't know. He's gone out.'

'Oh.' Morgan, turning, leaned back against the table, his hands holding the edge, his chin down, giving her that rather searching look which most people thought ill-mannered in him. 'Gone out, eh?' Anne nodded. 'Meaning you've broken the bad news?' Anne nodded once more. 'I knew you hadn't come back to town,' he said. 'I guess it's none of my business. But the truth was I couldn't help coming along over to have a look after you. I had a sort of hunch. . . . That is —— Well, maybe it's just my damnable curiosity. Perhaps you'd rather I got out, especially since I had no business coming to begin with.'

Anne shook her head; she was very alert, and she realized that she could not trust herself to speech. Her heart was beating. The impulse arose suddenly within her to tell him at once that there was nothing about herself which was not his business if he wished it to be, that she never wanted him to go away from her again. It was utterly unlike her. She was wholly foreign to herself. It was unbelievable that she wanted to say a thing like that. But she did want to.

'Looks to me as if it had been rather rough on you,' said Morgan gravely. 'What about Jasper? Is he spending the night out in all that?' He jerked his head toward the door.

'He has gone to get an automobile for me. I for-

got, and sent my own home. But — but you can take me back in yours.'

'If you like. . . . You've sent him to get you a car? Isn't that being rather hard on Jasper?'

She made a slight, impatient gesture. 'It's all right for *him*. He can dash off and jump into boats and things. . . .'

'Jump into boats?' Morgan repeated, looking still more closely at her. 'Say, wait a minute. Where does he think he's going to get a car from this time of night?'

'He said he was going to Slipwicket. I wanted to walk; but he said no, that he would get a car there and send it around for me.'

Morgan took one long, quick step to her side and snatched her wrist. 'You're not telling me that he's trying to get to Slipwicket in that boat of his?'

'Why,' said Anne, 'yes. Why shouldn't he?'

'How long ago did he leave?' He shook her violently. 'When did he go?'

'Just now,' said Anne. 'I don't know — not long ago. What's the matter?'

'You let him go out there in all this in a crazy catboat? Why didn't you just tell him to blow his brains out? It's suicide!'

'Suicide!' Anne whispered.

For an instant they stood, Morgan gripping her wrist very tightly, staring at each other. He saw a frightened look growing in her eyes. What his eyes were saying to her she did not know. He flung down her hand abruptly and turned for the door. 'Maybe I'm wrong,' he said, sweeping his hat off the table as he passed it. 'Maybe I can catch him.' The door seemed to burst open; a curl of wind licked into the

room so that the candle-flame danced and flared wildly, and she heard the breakers topple and crash upon the shingle. Morgan, like Jasper, had disappeared into the rushing darkness. Anne caught the slicker together around her throat and followed him.

A driving rain, coming level down the ravine, swept her right upon him. Morgan, less familiar with the path, had stopped to get his bearings. Anne pushed him on. 'This way, right ahead, that's it!' almost shrieking to make herself heard above the general pother and confusion, with the rain whipping into her hair and against the backs of her legs, so that the bottom of her skirt was drenched and her ankles felt soggy. The wind must have risen considerably since Jasper had left; it really was blowing with hurricane force now, swooping furiously off the moors and eddying crazily in the narrow strip along under the cliffs. If the gale had been fully on shore the pier would have been practically under water, supposing that it had stood at all; as it was the spray was sweeping it in hard, spattering bursts, and Anne caught his arm to save herself from being blown away as they worked out along the trembling planking.

The catboat was not there. Morgan hauled up the mooring line to make sure, for it would have been difficult to make out even a white-painted catboat ten feet away. They got down to the end of the pier. 'Jasper!' the man yelled, absurdly enough, 'Jasper!' He braced himself against a bollard, cupped his hands, and yelled and hallooed into the storm, as if that could do any good. The girl was crouched up close to his side, holding to him because she had to, the rain and spray plastering the hair about her cold and delicate face, which, though not the face of a beauty,

was yet so surpassingly beautiful. 'Jasper!' The gale flicked the puny word from his lips and scattered it into nothingness over the dark face of the sea.

There was no reply. . . .

The abruptness with which the shore-line had vanished behind him had exercised a kind of sobering effect upon Jasper. Bareheaded in the gale, he had seen the light on Mackerel Ledge and laughed, once, but then turning about to watch for the waves he had found himself cut off, alone on the running seas; the pier and the cliffs and even the dull whitishness of the breakers against the beach were all swallowed up instantaneously as it were, and as far away as if he had been dropped into the middle of the widest, the most desolate ocean in the world. It chilled him. The passion which had burst through him as he left the house wore itself down; his thoughts began to come back into some sort of intelligible order. The boat was an able one; as he cleared the shore the seas made up bigger and more threatening about him, but the little vessel ran on, in a series of long, quick, rushing surges — creaking and complaining and straining at the tiller, but always rising gallantly. He was plunged abruptly into a world of his own, a wild and enormous world, but one in which he was the only living creature — the only one. 'What the devil am I doing here?' he wondered, and watched the endless fretwork of the whitecaps, as they broke almost up to his elbow, and watched them and watched them until they transformed themselves into the shape of her face and the lovely shadows of her eyes, which he was never to see or know again. And in the sharp pain of that he let the boat yaw badly so that she staggered with her nose in the sea and was almost gone. He swore, sway-

ing on the tiller, and wondered dully what he had done to deserve this. 'But you haven't, Jasper,' she had said. 'You were finer to me than I thought any man ever could be.' But that made no sense, none at all. If she really thought that, he could exhort her, argue with her, show her his devotion —— But that was no good. He had held up the candle and looked into her eyes. And he meant nothing to her, nothing whatever.

But that thought stung him intolerably. It couldn't be true. Not after all that they had been to each other; no, it could not be true. She was just saying things. He was devoted to her; he belonged to her, he had given up everything for her. But it must have been his fault, somehow; she could not just drop him, for no reason whatever.

It must have been his fault. It is the way a man like Jasper Sigourney would have insisted upon seeing it. He had failed her in some way, and so he had driven her into this. The boat threatened to broach to again; he jerked himself together and fought her down and as the spray drenched him the lighthouse flashed red, not far away. The cat was running fast, and the wind whistled a strange, weird, dying note in the peak-halyard blocks. Strange and wild, but clean with the high and terrible cleanliness of the sea, and Jasper too, under the searing pain of what she had done to him, felt somehow ennobled in all that, as if he had been cut deeply, down to the truest things within him. And this was ridiculous, but it was what he thought. The boat plunged onward, and the water boiled beneath the counter. Yes, he thought, it was some failure of mine — in all this impossible mess — that has forced her to do this, though she

may not know it herself. And she would be too fine to allow herself to blame me for it. And this inexplicable anguish of hers — of course, she would feel that; she would feel how much she had hurt me, it would all be painful to her. . . .

It was about that time, I suppose, that Anne, sitting in the empty room, had forgotten him, had forgotten all about him.

But then, Sigourney was thinking, I have a duty toward her. It was, once more, his hopeless rectitude. And, 'What was it I came out here for?' he tried to remember, and as he did so the little ship, rolling heavily, creaked as though she would fling the mast out of her. Yes, then he remembered what he had come out there for. 'I will kill myself,' he had said, and she had made no answer. Jasper braced himself in the cockpit, his weight upon the bending tiller. Just ahead now the Dutch Uncle, opening and shutting that red eye of his steadfastly through the gale, stood up upon his lonely pile of rocks. It would all be simpler for her then, he thought, and, can I make that sacrifice for her? Yes, he thought, I can do that, for there is nothing left for me, nothing, nothing at all. . . .

'It's no use!' Morgan, on the pier-head, shouted abruptly down at her. 'Come away.' And then: 'Come away, I'm telling you. It's no good standing here!' He jerked at her arm as though he felt that he had to wake her up, for she was staring into all that spectacular outrageousness as if she were in a trance. 'Come on!' No, it was certainly of no use to stand there. Anne turned, and they picked their way carefully to the shore, and so along the path between the boulders and back to the cottage.

Morgan shook the rain out of his coat, dropped it over a chair, and sank his hands into his trousers pockets. Anne, her own arms limp at her sides, her head a little back, faced him. 'Haven't you got any sense?' Morgan muttered, and then, peremptorily: 'Go in there and put on some dry clothes. You're soaked through.' Anne did not lower her head, but her eyelids closed. She felt extremely tired. Even to realize what had taken place seemed to require a volitional effort of which she was incapable. People in situations of that sort must have emotions, she knew, but she had no emotions. 'Go on,' said Morgan again. 'Change your things. Or I'll have to change them on you. *You* don't have to catch pneumonia.'

He's telling me to change my clothes, Anne thought. I must change my clothes. And suddenly dropping her uplifted face she moved into the other room to comply. She heard noises going on in the living-room — a thudding sound, and Morgan swearing. She perceived that she was very wet and chilled and tired, but she could get no farther with these endless complications which appeared to have engulfed her. When at last she came back, the man was stooping before the fireplace. He had hunted out some wood and got a blaze going there, and the firelight was playing all over him, throwing the shadows in his face all the wrong way and making his cheek-bones stand out in ruddy high-lights. He jumped up, slewed the big chair around and made her sit down in it. 'You're absolutely frozen,' he said harshly, with a curious kind of angry solicitousness. 'You might take some care of yourself, anyway. There's no reason for you making a damned fool of yourself just because he has.'

'Cass, I think this is going a little farther than I can endure.'

'Well, you've got to endure it. The necessity arises occasionally, you know.' And then he changed his tone. 'I'm probably all wrong,' he said, with an effort at casualness. 'There's nothing to show he hasn't got to Slipwicket, is there? I've an idea the storm's beginning to blow over already. It had just about reached its limit. . . . If he knows anything at all about handling a boat ——'

'What are you going to do with me now?'

'Keep you in front of that fire until we see whether a machine comes round from Slipwicket. Of course I was wrong — he'll get through, with luck.'

'He couldn't,' said Anne slowly, 'be so wicked — so unutterably wicked.'

'Eh?'

'As to try to kill himself.'

'No. Of course not. Foolishness.'

'I should despise him,' said Anne. Some coherent response seemed to be shaping itself in her mind to the stupidity of that scene on the pier — stupid, she knew it to be, because it was all mere violence, outrage, fury. The wind and the sea can be as stupid as men when they surrender themselves to that.

Morgan sat himself down opposite to her. 'See here; I wonder whether you've got any remote approach to an idea of what you've done to that boy.'

'I haven't done anything to him.'

'No, nothing at all,' said the other with a savage sarcasm. 'Nothing whatever. My God! I suppose tearing the poor fool to pieces and then letting him chuck himself out into that mess isn't doing anything to him!'

Anne knew that if he went on in this way she could not stand it. She could not fight with him. He had deprived her of her powers. If he chose to command her, she would obey. If he chose to beat her, punish her, she would yield to it. But to maintain this obscure quarrel with him might be more than she could find the courage for. And so, calling up all her resources, she made her voice as hard and clear as she was able: 'You cannot talk in this way to me. You must tell me at once what you think has happened. What did you mean when you said that it was suicide?'

'I didn't mean anything. I just said it.'

'Were you thinking only that it was dangerous for him to go, or that — that he wanted it to be dangerous?'

'What do you suppose?' Morgan demanded abruptly, leaning forward as if, she thought, he were about to shake his fist in her face. 'What do you imagine? Or do you ever imagine anything about other people beside yourself?' And there seemed actually to be a menace in his always rather savage eyes. 'Do you think you're a little walking vacuum or that all the rest of the lot is deaf, dumb and blind to you? I'd like to know what anybody would think if you'd calmly told them that that boy had gone out in a catboat in the middle of a hurricane to get you an automobile from Slipwicket! Slipwicket! Why, it'd take all night alone for the car to get around here. I don't know how many kinds of a crazy idiot Jasper Sigourney can make of himself in half an hour, but you ought to have some faint idea of it.'

'I would hate him,' said Anne.

Morgan flung back in his chair. 'I don't know what

the boy has done. But I can guess what he'd feel like doing.'

'It's a little too much,' said Anne at length. 'I wonder what you expect me to say. I have nothing to say.'

'No, I suppose you haven't, now. You've made about as bad a mess of the whole works as any one could reasonably expect to make, and now you haven't anything to say.'

'You make me want to cry,' said Anne. 'But I am not going to. I did nothing except what seemed to me the right thing to do. If it has turned out badly it's not my fault. And it is just as hard for me as it is for others.'

'I don't know what you think doing right amounts to,' said Morgan more soberly. 'You could have left him alone in the first place. You could have stood by him when his wife came down on him. But apparently that didn't seem right to you. I don't know what got into you, but you've let him down, flat.'

'You might leave that for Jasper to say.'

'If he's saying anything,' Morgan replied.

There was a dead silence at that, Anne staring so fixedly at the fire that the man wondered why it did not hurt her eyes. 'No,' she said finally, 'I will not believe that of him until I know that it's true. It would be too horrible.'

'No, you won't believe it of him because it would be too horrible. Good God, weren't you in love with the man at all?'

'I don't know. I don't think so.'

'It would have saved something if you'd told him so to begin with. I never thought you had an especially low opinion of yourself. But you talk now as if it was

the simplest thing in the world to tell a boy who's backed you with everything he had that you're so sorry, it was all a mistake, so long, hope you'll be happy . . .'

'That doesn't hurt me — when you say it.'

'Last week you were telling me that you could never leave him — something like that.'

'Last week you were telling me that I ought to leave him. You said that broken hearts come cheap on the market. And now you are blaming me for it — blaming me for things that no one can help.'

Morgan threw up his hands.

'What do you want?' Anne asked. 'What do you wish me to believe? If it had not been for you we should never have come here to begin with. Then I think it must have been you who were responsible in some way for bringing that girl here. Then you come and try to argue me into leaving him. And now you want to break my heart with stupid quarreling because I have. I can't argue with you. It is more than I can face. Tell me what you mean.'

'What do I mean?' Morgan repeated almost furiously. 'What do I ——?' His voice dropped abruptly. 'God knows,' he said at length, and sat there, like a statue, Anne thought, like something unlike anything else in the world, obscurely strong, incomprehensible and permanent. He has destroyed me, she felt.

'You come here talking to me,' she said, 'and there's no sense to it.'

She seemed to have forced him into movement. The man jerked himself up out of his chair and crossed over, so that he was standing at her elbow looking down upon her, his hands clasped behind his back.

'I've already told you why, once,' he said. 'You didn't believe me. Not that I'm surprised at that. But I'll tell you again. I'm in love with you. I'm absolutely mad about you, if you want me to say it. And I guess at that, being in love with you is enough to drive any man crazy.'

Anne stared straight up at him, through appalled eyes. 'You're *not* . . .'

'Yes, I am,' he said harshly. 'Just that. Only, unlike most people, I happen to know what that signifies, and to be willing to admit it to myself.' He turned abruptly away from her and walked off a few steps through the room. 'At bottom,' he was saying, 'it signifies that I want to go to bed with you. That isn't pretty, but it's the fact. . . . And no very valid reason in itself for acting like a blithering idiot. . . . Oh, don't let me shock you just because I make a distant approach to the truth. It means a lot else besides, of course.' He swung round, at a distance. 'I guess you think my attitude on the Jasper question is just natural human sympathy. Well, human beings aren't naturally sympathetic. It's merely that I happen to have a first hand idea of the particular little hell you put him through here to-night. I know the hold you had on him — I guess I ought to. Maybe I don't go around calling you a little tin angel with the white icing on, the way he does, because you aren't one, not by a long shot. Has that got anything to do with it? It has not. Yes, I know the way he felt, all right, even if you don't seem to.'

Anne had dropped her face in her hands, her fingers over her ears. 'If I had spent six months,' said Morgan, raising his voice, 'thinking that you cared for me, and then had you simply announce one day

that it was a mistake and that I'd better get out —— My God,' he said, 'when I think of that poor kid walking out of here into that storm — I don't know whether he went to drown himself or went to Slipwicket, but I know damn well that he wanted to drown himself, and it makes me sick, I tell you, it makes me absolutely sick.'

There was no sound whatever from the figure by the fire, 'You don't think I've been acting very consistently, eh? Well, I haven't been, and that makes me sick, too.... It doesn't do you any good to put your hands over your ears.' She felt him coming back to her chair. He caught her hands roughly, and pulled them away. She lifted her eyes, and her face was very white. 'And how about you, if it comes to that?' he demanded. 'Last week you were telling him that you were his forever; to-night you tell him that it's all over.'

'Yes,' said Anne slowly. 'Do you know why?'

'No, I don't.'

Anne rose from the chair, standing away from him, but facing him. 'A few minutes ago,' she said, 'I thought that I would never tell you. But it is possible to ask too much.... You have just said that you wanted me.'

'Worse than I ever wanted anything in my life,' the man muttered.

'Didn't you ever guess that I might — that I might feel the same way?'

Morgan, struck suddenly silent, looked at her.

'Take me,' she said.

He seemed not to understand. 'That is the reason,' she said. He suddenly bent down his head, so that he looked into her eyes and she looked fearlessly back

into his. And so they stood for as much as half a minute perhaps. Then Morgan straightened up. 'Oh,' he said, with his voice queerly subdued, and stepped back so that he came into contact with the table-edge, which he gripped with his hands behind him as he had done earlier in the evening. Only now his big knuckles stood out sharp and white.

'Oh,' he said again. 'You mean — you mean that is what it is?'

'I mean that is what it is. If you will have me, Cass, I am yours.'

There was a profound silence, and then a whisper of wind about the house, and then Casimir beginning: 'My dear girl ——' and leaving the sentence to die upon the room.

'I don't understand it,' said Anne. 'It has just happened to me. Yesterday. In the hotel parlor. I never knew before. . . . It makes no difference what you say to me. Jasper makes no difference. Nothing can make a difference.' She saw his hands clench and unclench along the hard edge of the table. But he said nothing. 'I wouldn't have let him go, Cass, if it had not been something like that. I wasn't thinking about the storm; I wasn't even thinking about him. I would have fulfilled everything I owed him, all the rest of my life, but with this, you see, it's no longer a question of owing. I could have meant nothing more to him. . . .'

He passed one hand over his forehead. 'I didn't guess anything like that,' he said. 'You can't lay that against me. . . .'

She held her arms at her sides, the palms out. 'But now. . .?'

He pulled himself erect by what seemed a powerful

effort. 'No,' he said, meeting her gaze, 'no, no.' For the second time he turned his back upon her. 'You've got it all wrong,' he said, from a distant part of the room. And then: 'I must feel the way a man does when he's going insane. . . .' And then there was a long silence.

When at last he faced her he found that she had fallen into a chair. 'You do care for me,' she said slowly. 'You love me. I know that. Or I wouldn't have told you.'

'Yes, it is true.'

'What is holding you back? Is it Jasper?'

'No, it isn't Jasper.' He was wandering aimlessly up and down behind her chair. She made an effort to find him with her eyes, but it was wearisome, and the room was obscure.

'Then what?' she asked.

'I don't know,' said Morgan. 'The way I'm made. The way the world's made.'

'Cass!' she said.

He was speaking again, in a dry voice. 'Listen. I wouldn't have said what I did — just now — if I'd had any idea . . . I meant it, all right. But I told you I knew what love signifies. I've experienced it as often as most men of my age. It doesn't get you anywhere. Nothing gets you anywhere. I gave up the game — the whole rotten game — years ago. That doesn't prevent a man from feeling like a fool; no, but I know enough not to act like one.'

'I don't understand,' she said.

'I've got an income big enough to live on. That's all I do. I just gave the whole thing up because — I don't care what you're playing it with, whether it's love, or a good job, or getting your name in the papers,

or making money, you can't win. I've seen too much of it. It's no use to try. I know that. It's all I know.'

'You are inhuman,' she said, 'if you really mean that.'

'Good God! I do mean it. Listen, women for me are women in the street. That's my limit. That's not what you want. That's not what I'd want, either, with you. But we wouldn't get what we wanted. Look at Jasper.'

'You are afraid.'

'If you like.'

'You are a coward.'

He was silent for a time, his hands working together. 'Or,' he said, in a low voice, 'the only brave man I ever met. It's no good, Anne, it's no good.' And he sat down, away from her.

The storm, by this time, had died down considerably. The surf was still booming on the beach, but the wind had wandered away in fragmentary whispers and little, mean-spirited rustlings. There was already a good deal of light in the eastern window, and a kind of grayness seemed to be creeping through the room, changing both of them into something older, more sharp in outline, more pale in coloring.

'I shall go mad,' said Anne.

'You won't go mad. Or come anywhere near it. You may learn something. Something real, I mean. You are a beautiful woman. In a world made up of as many fools as this one, it means that you have a power over people that you'll have to answer for, Anne.'

'I've always been willing to answer.'

'No, you haven't. You've been trying to float along through life on a bunch of beautiful theories about

the lonely dignity of your soul, and it's got you into trouble. They're as much nonsense in their way as Jasper's theories. You believe that I love you. Well, I love you enough to tell you that.'

'Cass!' she cried, and as she spoke the name she knew that it was her final effort.

He did not answer her. . . .

It appeared that some one was rapping at the door. Morgan opened it; and there was a man, in a sou'-wester and slicker, standing in the sharp light of the morning. 'I've come over from Mackerel Ledge,' he was saying. 'The lighthouse. There's the fore part of a catboat piled up on the rocks west of the tower. We didn't see her strike. We didn't see her at all until an hour or so ago.'

'Well?'

'She looks like yours. And we noticed this'n's missing.'

'Was there anybody in her?' said Morgan.

The man looked at him curiously. 'That's what I come to ask you,' he said. 'She's a regular mess. Only half of her's there and the mast's gone. But we didn't find no one.'

'There wasn't anybody. She must have broken loose. Never mind.' . . .

He returned to the girl. 'Is it safe to leave you here by yourself? I don't want to drive you back in my car.'

Anne looked at him, and felt the anguish of frustration, and unbearable loss, and the horror of the boatman's message. 'Yes,' she said, 'it is perfectly safe.'

And that, I think, is a measure of her peculiar but indomitable courage. Morgan amazingly snatched her hand, made an awkward sort of peck at it, and vanished.

XVI

And so it should all have ended neatly, in a tragedy. But it did not. The conclusion — if it can be called a conclusion — was less spectacular than that, less satisfactory, perhaps, and much more in accord with normal human experience. Both Anne and Jasper had fine qualities in them, it seems to me, and since it was rather by their virtues than by their vices that they were betrayed, they may have been touched with the tragic character. But the meanest of all the advantages which life appears to have over us, the last and most contemptible of its cheats, is its power of reducing us in the end to the ridiculous. Neither Jasper nor Anne had the genius to overcome the essential absurdity of things. For, as it turned out, it all was rather absurd. For Jasper, it seemed, was not drowned. On the contrary, when Morgan went — because he did not see how he could avoid it — to give his account to Nina Bradstreet, he discovered to his immense surprise that the man was actually in the next room, recovering from what seemed to have been nothing more than a case of exposure and a bad cold. . . .

Jasper himself could scarcely remember whether he had really intended to run the catboat upon the rocks under the feet of the Dutch Uncle. When he had first made out the white flecking of the breakers beneath the lighthouse his thoughts, in the general tumult of the wind and sea, were tumultuous, a little mad, whipped by the stinging bitterness of catastrophe. He had, he supposed, loved this girl; there

had been a passionate intensity in his feeling for her of which he had not known himself to be capable, and the loss lashed him with all the intolerable, if ephemeral, cruelty of passion. And yet, in the midst of the running seas, with the red winking light growing up rapidly above him and the white line of breakers stretching off along the rocks to the west of it, that chilling sense of his isolation, of his aloneness in immensity, persisted, so that in some way he knew the transient quality of all this and its unimportance, and he found himself actually counting the revolutions of the light, idly, as he might have kept time to the ticking of a clock while waiting in an anteroom.

And then the memory of the evening when they had watched this light and given it that pet name together overwhelmed him, as the waves rising up under the stern threatened to overwhelm the catboat, and he remembered that he had run out into the storm thinking that he would not come back again. And it seemed to him that there was no use facing this misery and this failure, and that although there was nothing else which he could do for her, he could do that much at least, and that it would be heroic and the final proof, to himself, of the genuineness of the devotion which he had sworn to her. And so at least he would have saved that certitude out of the wreck.

Yes, he thought, as the boat rolled and plunged beneath him, he could do that much for her, and if he were to do it it would have to be against these rocks which stretched out before him. The light actually stood a little to his left, on his port bow, and he thought of letting the boat head up a little more, so that she would come fairly against it. But no, he thought, he would not do that, because then the men

in the light might save him; he had better keep on as he was, because the reef tended across his course — he supposed if he kept on as he was he would probably hit something — he did not know, for he had forgotten just how the rocks lay, and so it was about an even chance whether he hit anything or not, and perhaps that was better. And besides, with that lonely and detached part of his mind it seemed to him that maybe it did not really matter much anyway, one could more easily leave it to chance; and so he held on his course because he had not decided to do either one thing or the other. . . .

And then the light was coming very close above him, and he realized that it would not be long before he would be nearing the reef and that he had better decide one way or the other, when there was a violent shock, a great rush of sea-water, and a tiny, sharply etched memory of a splintering noise somewhere in his head. He had struck. . . .

Sooner than he had expected. It was a frightful blow; an outlying fragment of the reef had plucked the little boat out of the full scend of a following sea, and stopped her dead. Jasper did not know what happened. It seemed to him afterward that it was principally sea-water which happened. He had been sitting up on the washboard of the cockpit, and he must have been jerked clear overboard — clear of the rocks, clear of everything, so that he found himself floundering in the seas, with something large and white going off to one side of him and something else coming up alongside. The catboat must have cleared herself and gone staggering along to fetch up in the cleft under the lighthouse where her bows were found next morning. But she had snapped the mast off

short and left it, with the gaff and a tangle of halliards and some ribbons of the sail, to bob up beside Jasper.

He did what one might expect any average young man to do. He snatched at it, flung one arm over the heavy stick, and just saved himself from having his head knocked in by the end of the gaff. There must have been a hurried five minutes in all that wild tumble of water while he managed to lash the spars together with the trailing lines and lash himself to them. He does not remember it. He remembers only finding himself secured to the mast after a fashion, with the reef safely to windward, a great waste of whitecaps all about and a bitter taste of salt in his mouth and throat. He was, for the moment, out of danger.

And his first feeling was one of intense surprise — a kind of horrified amazement as to how he could have got himself into that insane predicament. He was, he said afterward, like a man suddenly waking out of a dream. It was not that he was frightened. He said that it did not occur to him to be frightened; it was like an abrupt return to reality out of some sort of hallucination, and since his every-day reality included no especial fear of death, the idea that death was still imminent never came into his mind.

He was too much surprised at himself. That feeling of nobility, of the heroism of his intended sacrifice, of the dignity of his grief, seems all to have been washed out of him in the instant, leaving him clinging there to the spar feeling grotesquely mean and cold. He wondered a little at the incredible folly of what he had proposed to do. And then, as the drenching waves choked and numbed him, his whole impulse

shriveled before his eyes into the stupidity of an outraged egotism. Perhaps he understood then that it really made no difference to her whether he lived or died. It had not been his fault. It had had nothing to do with him. He had only deceived himself into thinking so because he had wished to think so; he had blamed himself only because if it were on his account that she had left him, that would still have given him some claim over her, whereas if what she had said were the truth, it would mean that she was indeed lost to him in every way. The sacrifice which he had proposed was not really to her, but to his own jealous self-love — and even so he had not succeeded, at the final moment, in making it. And so the whole great structure of his idealism came down in irretrievable ruin about him, and he drifted on, with an aching loss in his heart and indifference in his mind. He realized presently that he was slipping from his improvised raft, and managed to hitch himself somewhat higher, and a genuine fear began slowly to assert itself. But even then, I think, it was less the ocean which frightened him than it was this appalling reality into which he seemed for the first time to be looking, and the trivial romanticism which had brought him into it. He had a dull contempt for his motives, but he did not blame himself especially; there was still too much the quality of a trick or deceit about it all, but the deceit was too implicit in himself, in his being, in the fact of his existing at all, for him to experience any great bitterness over it. He did not think that anything mattered greatly, except the immediate precariousness of his situation; and he did what he could to meet that, while the gale passed on across the sea, and he drifted with it, battered and drowned. . . .

It was not until six o'clock in the morning that a fishing boat, coming out from Slipwicket with the moderation of the gale, found him and took him off, more dead, as the books say, than alive. It had been a bad night, and a narrow shave. The fishermen did not say much. They thought, I suppose, that there was no limit to the madness of landsmen, and so they got him ashore as quickly as possible, gave him hot coffee, and seemed relieved when he said that he was all right and asked to be taken to Ocean View. A young man drove him across in a Ford truck, saying nothing until Jasper had finally been set down at the steamer dock.

'Well,' he said then, 'I guess this'll learn you not to fool with nor'easter's.'

Jasper thanked him, but did not reply to the observation.

THE END

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SAND CASTLE

WALTER MILLIS

WALTER MILLIS

was born in Atlanta, Georgia, and had most of his schooling in Manila, Cleveland, Ohio, and Providence, Rhode Island. 'At Yale,' he says, 'I was an editor of the *Lit.* and knew the great men of my generation — Thornton Wilder, Philip Barry, Stephen Vincent Benét, Cyril Hume, John Farrar, and other lights in what was popularly called (at New Haven at any rate) the "Yale literary renaissance."'

After the War, he went into newspaper work and began by writing editorials on the *Baltimore News*. He later served on the *New York Sun* and is now with the *New York Herald Tribune*. 'Although I have a good deal to say about newspapers in my book,' he explains, 'I am not writing about the *Herald Tribune*, as any one familiar with the paper will at once recognize.'

'Sand Castle' was begun during a vacation in the Balearic Islands. 'My room,' says Millis, 'opened upon the quay through large Spanish windows, and an admiring populace used to gather outside to listen to the typewriter. I imagine that the best books are probably written in business offices or railroad trains, but I am sure that if a movie magnate had been looking for a scene showing an Author Composing a Masterpiece he would have looked on me as the perfect subject.'

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